

FOUR MORE YEARS OF BUSH: WHAT DO WE DO NOW?

punk planet

notes from underground

ISSUE #66 | MARCH AND APRIL 2005 \$4.95 US
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SLINT
reunited





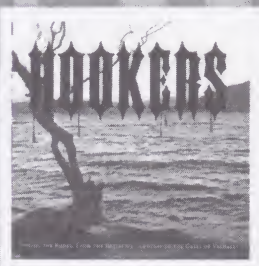
DES ARK - Loose Lips Sink Ships
CD on Bifocal Media

With their Jay Mascis/Zeno Gill recorded debut full length, Des Ark delivers the intimidating sexual energy of PJ Harvey, the power of Shellac, and the song writing grace of Blonde Redhead. Comprised of Tim Herzog (Milemarker/Jade Tree) on drums and Aimee Argote (Rubeo/Mr. Lady Records) on guitar/vocals, Des Ark is not a background music kind of band. Des Ark is a "Holy shit! This is crushingly sexy, intense and intelligent!" kind of band.



THE BLACKOUTS - Living In Blue
CD on Lucid Records

The Blackouts are one of AP's "100 Bands to Know in 2005" with a 5 out of 5 review! They won Little Steven's Underground Garage Band Contest in the end of last year and opened for Iggy Pop, New York Dolls, and The Strokes in NYC! 100 proof Rock and Roll!



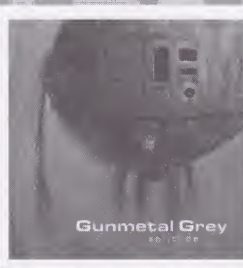
HOOKERS - Casting The Runes
2XCD on This Dark Reign

Lexington, Kentucky's mighty Hookers with their metal tinged punk style and in yer face attitude release their eagerly anticipated anthology on two compact discs. May they RIP.



WHOLE WHEAT BREAD - Minority Rules
CD on Fighting Records

Produced by Darian Rundall (Pennywise, Yellowcard, Strung Out) The Debut Album By Jacksonville's Ghetto Punks "A Powerful Slice of Punk... and hidden hip-hop too" - Orlando Sentinel "Aggressive and Infectious" - Orlando Weekly



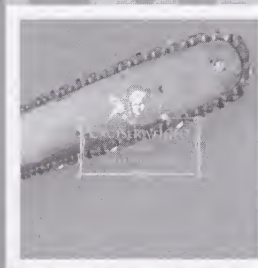
GUNMETAL GRAY - Solitude
CD on Indianola Records

Helping bring the METAL back to the Bay Area! Recommended for fans of Shadows Fall, Killswitch Engage, In Flames, and early Metallica. "Solitude" firmly places Gunmetal Grey in the pantheon of revered METAL acts.



L'SPAEROW - S/T
CD on Lucid Records

Featuring Chris Broach (The Firebird Band, Braid), "...there's something darkly seductive about this record..." - Brooke Black, actionattackhelicopter.com "...Broach's efforts have been more interesting to follow for music fans who preferred the John Cales of the world to the Lou Reeds... this is smothering, close almost claustrophobic music..." Erick Bieritz, lostatsea.net

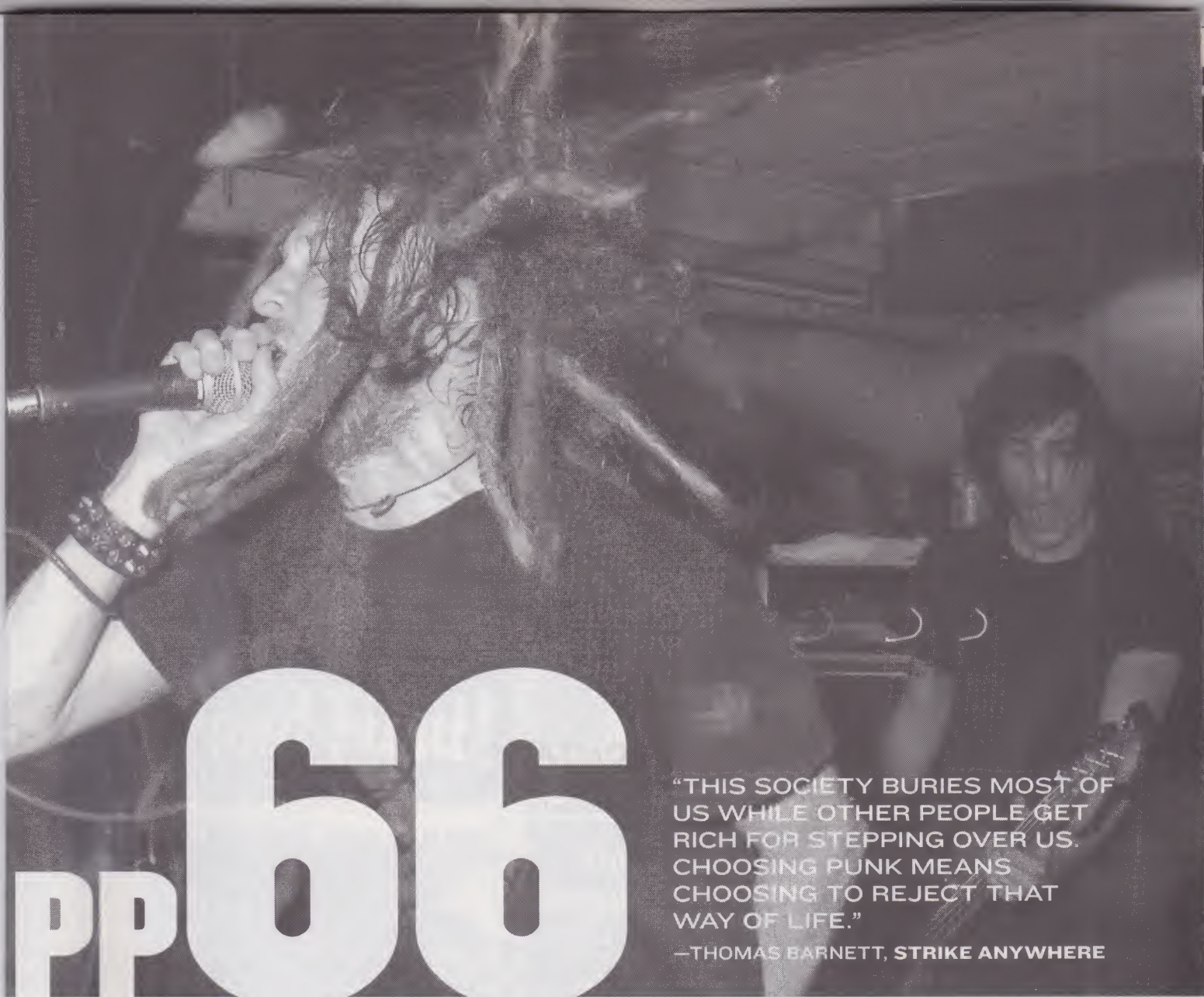


CRUISERWEIGHT - Sweet Weaponry
CD on Doghouse Records

Cruiserweight is a female fronted pop-rock band from Austin, TX. The four piece band, consisting mostly of siblings, has managed to sell over 12,000 copies of their 2 self released EPs. Sweet Weaponry is the band's debut album, released collectively by Doghouse and Heinous February 15th, 2005. Full of catchy hooks and sing-a-long choruses, the 13 song album paints a happy picture of life in a band on the road.

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PP66

"THIS SOCIETY BURIES MOST OF US WHILE OTHER PEOPLE GET RICH FOR STEPPING OVER US. CHOOSING PUNK MEANS CHOOSING TO REJECT THAT WAY OF LIFE."

—THOMAS BARNETT, **STRIKE ANYWHERE**

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Two indie giants team up; rollery derby returns; the Scotland Yard Gospel Choir; high school zinemaker Kathee Terell; Clear Channel's new low; the debut of "Icebergtown"; and more!

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Everything that Lives, Eats*

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Ads are due March 21 for PP68

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the risks

intro66

The irony of work that is truly lasting—that makes an impact larger than itself—is that you never can tell that you've done it until long after it's been put out in the world. Sure, there are some things that hit big the moment they're released into the wild, but many of those things are transient; they're one-hit wonders and flashes in the pan: fun for a moment and then easy to dispose of. They're not art, they are commerce. Art that lasts—art that truly changes things—looks different. It's the difference between, say, the Macarena, and Slint's *Spiderland*.

No one could have predicted the album's impact when it was initially released in 1991. They certainly had no idea—they had broken up by the time it came out. But in the 14 years since its release, it's not even possible anymore to count the number of albums and bands that have borrowed something from its myriad of innovations. There's a very good chance your very favorite band or your absolute favorite record owes something to Slint. That the band didn't survive long enough to collect the accolades that come along with creating something so influential is both one of the truly great tragedies and charms of the entire Slint story.

When three of the four members of Slint announced in the late fall that they were reuniting for a handful of shows this spring, it caught a lot of people by surprise. One of those people was *Punk Planet* contributing editor Jeff Guntzel, whose in-depth

article and revealing interview with Slint guitarist Dave Pajo that graces our issue's cover may be one of the best pieces of music journalism we've ever published.

On the opposite end of the spectrum content-wise (though certainly not quality-wise) is the special section "What [in god's name] Do We Do Now." Spanning 12 text-packed pages, this section (edited by our own Anne Elizabeth Moore) begins the work of sifting through the post-election rubble by starting a discussion among four diverse activists about where we go from here. It's an inspiring section that will hopefully lead you toward four years of actions against our newly re-elected president.

On a personnel note, we've worked with the talented Cate Levinson for almost two years now and are glad to say that while she's stepping down from her post as managing editor, she's staying on in the newly created position of senior writer—we're excited to see the pieces she brings in. Also, our multi-tasking mailorder/office manager Dave Hofer is taking on new duties as associate reviews editor to help the overworked Kyle Ryan dig through our almost 500 reviews per issue. We're lucky to have people like Cate and Dave on our side and are glad they're sticking around!

See you next issue for Art & Design 3!

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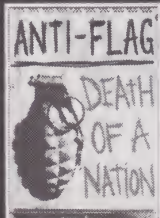
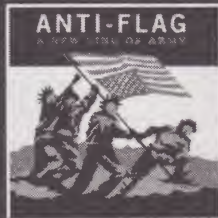
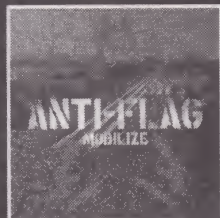
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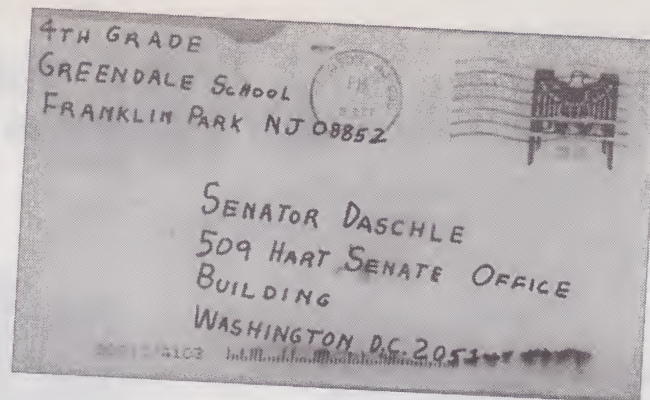
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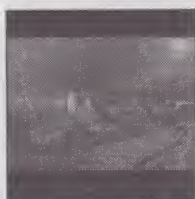
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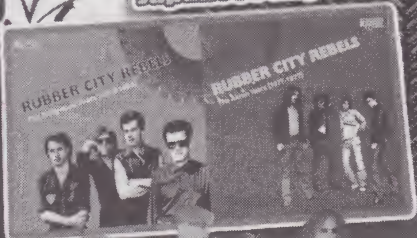
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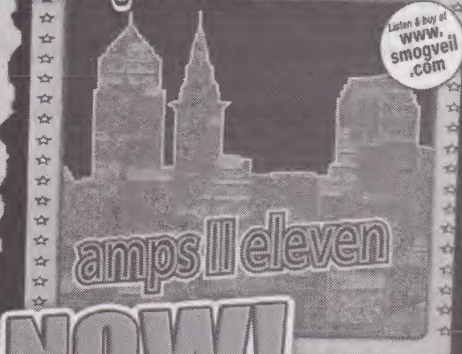
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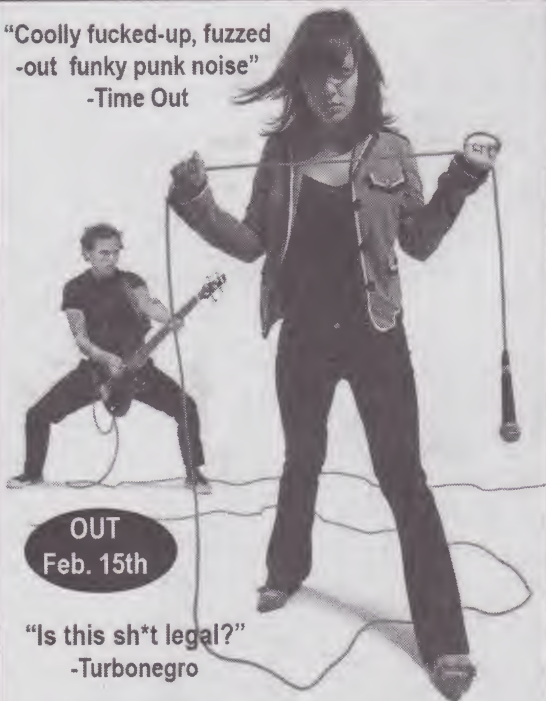
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Lords

Jan'05: **MORAL DARKNESS** 4-song 7" (AUX4) • April'05: **WORDS** full length LP/CD (AUX5)
Louisville's LORDS follow up their pant-soiling first EP with two new releases in early '05. The "Moral Darkness" 7" lays down four new thrashers and a spoken word scorcher that brings to mind "Hot Animal Machine." Includes big art. Their debut full length, the aptly titled "Words," will be unsheathed soon after, and is sure to firmly plant them in the throne of all Black Flag / Megadeth / Born Against / Kinghorse inspired legions. Despite MRR's assumption, these derelicts never went to college and won't cut their fucking hair.

SKULL FARMERS

May'05: **SKULL FARMERS** full length LP/CD (AUX6) The illegitimate brain child of Evan Patterson (Breather Resist, Black Cross) and Stan Doll (Lords), SKULL FARMERS owes more than a passing debt to Northwest noise mongers Godheadslilo, Karp, and even our good buddies in the recently defunct Harkonen. With just bass, drums, vocals and a shitload of amps, these guys lay waste to the unsuspecting at every show they crash.

COLISEUM / DOOM RIDERS

June'05: **COLISEUM / DOOM RIDERS** split 7"/CD (AUX7) Barnstorming punk rock road warriors COLISEUM follow up their releases on Level Plane and Manic Ride on this split with Boston's skatedoom thrashers DOOM RIDERS (including Nate from Converge / Old Man Gloom), who just released a full length on Deathwish. They both play great punked out hardcore and each did a Danzig cover on this split, it's good.

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Ruth Schwartz is relaxed. "I've got nothing but time," says the founder of independent distributor Mordam Records. After 25 years in the rough-and-tumble world of record distribution, she's decided to do something else, a decision that led to her selling Sacramento-based Mordam to competitor Lumberjack Distribution, based in Toledo, Ohio. (Full disclosure: Mordam distributes *Punk Planet*.)

"There're two parts that made me decide to do it," Schwartz says. "The first one was that I'm tired of being in charge of this, and the second is that the business cycle in distribution is coming around again and it's going to demand a whole new layer of changes and energy and vision." Energy Schwartz says she doesn't have.

The problem, Schwartz says, is that competition has become ferocious and threat-

ens companies the size of Mordam or Lumberjack. Mordam's original business model entailed pooling the collective clout of numerous indie labels to get paid and treated fairly. The Lumberjack buyout is an extension of that: more labels, more clout, more services.

In this age of corporate mega-mergers, it seems a bit odd that two of the staunchest independent distributors in the record business are, in a way, replicating that model. It's doubly weird because Lumberjack based its business on Mordam's model. The strangeness isn't lost on Lumberjack owner Dirk Hemsath.

"It's kind of weird because you feel like you're starting to get into the corporate games, but on the other hand, it makes a lot of sense," he says. "Lumberjack buying Mordam, it's really more of a merger. We don't see it as an acquisition."

Starting this year, the

company will be known as the Lumberjack-Mordam Music Group. Although it will group labels by Mordam or Lumberjack, a large sales staff will work both groups. The brand identity may remain the same, but big changes are in store to make Lumberjack-Mordam compete with the big boys.

One of the biggest weaknesses for the two indie distributors has been access to major national chain accounts (Best Buy, Barnes & Noble, Borders, and the like). Some labels have left Mordam or Lumberjack in the past because they lacked the firepower to get into those retailers.

To be honest, very few indie labels are able to sell in Best Buy, as it requires a strong sales history and a lot of money, and in the past, Mordam and Lumberjack have used larger distributors such as Caroline (a competitor) to get into the big-box stores. It wasn't a perfect solution.

The new Lumberjack-Mordam Music Group will have its own sales staff handling national chains directly. While Schwartz says 90 percent of the company's volume will go to indie dis-

tributors, labels won't feel as limited by the new company.

"It's not like you *have* to sell the big-box chains," Schwartz says. "My point is that the hard thing about being where we are is we haven't been able to do that direct; we always have to rely on somebody else to do the big stuff, and even then we lose [labels]. That's not saying labels won't always go to other distributors, but it won't be because of a perceived ceiling."

Access to the big retailers is bolstered by the help of WEA, the distribution arm of major-label Warner Brothers Records. It's called a "pick, pack, and ship" agreement, where WEA only ships the records and makes sure Lumberjack-Mordam's clients get paid. Without having an intermediary like Caroline handling the records, Hemsath says his labels will receive more money for sales.

The WEA part is possible through a development deal Hemsath's label, Doghouse, signed with Warner. Doghouse and Warner work together to develop a couple of artists every year that Doghouse has signed or is going to sign. Such agreements are becoming more



"I would love if someone was listening to our album all alone, lying in bed."

THE SCOTLAND YARD GOSPEL CHOIR MAKES THE MUSIC THEY WISH THEIR FAVORITE BANDS WOULD.

The Scotland Yard Gospel Choir is not from Scotland. They do not play gospel music. They are not a choir. But what this spectacular eight-person band does make is moody, charming, and catchy orchestral pop. It's the perfect soundtrack for daydreaming while walking down a busy, winter street. Elia Einhorn and Matt "Boston" Kerstein began the band as an acoustic duo and later brought in a horn section, a cellist, and a violin player to give their songs a rich, dynamic sound. SYGC's self-produced record, *I Bet You Say That to All the Boys*, features songs that draw from a wide range of folk, punk, and rock influences. "Bet You Never Thought It Would Be Like This," is a striking, heartfelt and brassy ballad, "Tear Down the Opera House" rails like a Clash rave-up, and "Ellen's Telling Me What I Want to Hear," spins nervously like the best Brit-pop of the '80s. I talked to Elia and Boston in Chicago at the coffee shop where they work, when they are not playing their own brand of thoughtful, magic music.

What's really great about your band is how surprising each song is and how truly varied the wide variety of musical influences in it are.

Elia: A few years ago, Boston and I took a road trip to LA and when we got back all the CDs we brought were in different cases,

common in the indie world.

The new company will also have an extensive business-to-business Internet portal, where labels will be able to set up releases online, plan their marketing, monitor cost and record stock levels, and track record sales in near real-time. Finally, the new deal will also dramatically increase the range of services the company offers to labels, from manufacturing to financial assistance, marketing and promotion.

It's all a sort of one-stop shop, and to some it may sound too good to be true. Hemsath admits that a couple of Mordam labels left the distributor right after the buyout announcement. A lot of Mordam labels feel a strong loyalty

to Schwartz, so not surprisingly, they were a bit skittish when Schwartz revealed she was not only selling the company but quitting the business. (She's contracted to stay on as a consultant for at least six months.)

"I told my labels I'm going to leave you in better shape than I got you," Schwartz says.

To help alleviate concerns, Mordam and Lumberjack had a convention in Las Vegas in early January to discuss everything with labels face to face. Deep Elm Records was one of them.

"With regard to the Mordam labels, they are of course concerned with how it will all work out, as Ruth will no longer be running the show," says Deep Elm Records own-

er John Szuch. "All of the labels involved love what they do, have staffs, responsibilities to bands and are concerned with change. This is our livelihood."

Deep Elm had planned to switch from Southern distribution to Lumberjack starting in April. The buyout announcement didn't surprise Szuch, though.

"We had been in discussion with Lumberjack for a good while before the merger announcement," says Deep Elm owner John Szuch, "and while Dirk did not specifically tell us what would be happening, he explained in so many words what benefits were on the horizon."

The company's short-term

goal, Hemsath says, is to make sure no one else leaves and immediately increase sales and marketing. He hopes in the long term to lure back some labels that left Mordam and Lumberjack in the past because of the companies' limitations.

"I think it's just a matter of time before we get some labels that previously thought they were going to greener pastures that have realized 'This isn't that much greener,'" Hemsath says.

Schwartz agrees, but she's not worried. After doing this for so long, she doesn't have the energy to for it. What's next for her?

"Something else," she says. She hasn't decided—and she's in no hurry. —Kyle Ryan

so that Bob Dylan was in the Velvet Underground case and the Smiths were in the *American Anthology of Folk Music Number Two* case. I think that's the answer somehow, that's what we do. Our brains are swirling with songs from both major and minor influences.

What is really appealing is how there's something very personal and very intimate about the songs you guys play.

Boston: A friend of mine in New York who saw us at CMJ said she was struck by how we are just ourselves onstage. The thing in New York is to play this loud, brash music and to say, "I'm cool. I don't give a fuck." That's not us.

To me it's music that you play all the time when you're alone.

Boston: I would love if someone was listening to our album all alone, lying in bed.

Elia: A fan of ours, Liz, said that a couple of our songs "Topsy Turvy" and "Good Kind of Crazy" had gotten her through a terrible break-up. Hearing that felt great.

Tell me about the song "Bet You Never Thought It Would Be Like This," the opening track on the album. It's a stellar duet between you, Boston, and Ellen O'Hayer.

Boston: It has a refrain that has meaning and sticks in your head. When you're younger thinking about college and life, most people's lives don't turn out the way they thought they would. Also, it's about my life and music and how I've found people who have found themselves doing what they've wanted to do. I've wanted to

make music since I was in sixth grade, but being a musician isn't ever exactly what you expected.

Elia: It's funny. When you play with bands who are in *Rolling Stone*, you think they are going to be rich and funny. But we've played with a bunch of bands who've been in there and they're like us, in their 20s, doing whatever they can.

Does that disappoint you?

Boston: No, it's not as romantic as you thought, in some ways. Working in a coffee shop all the time, you think you hit 24 and you should have it made by now. But it's surprising doing interviews or talking to people we've never met before who say they like our music, or hearing you sold some records in Portland, where we didn't even know we had distribution.

Something musicians rarely talk about is how much of rock music is an ongoing conversation between you and your influences.

Elia: A lot of it is the indie rock world, where they want to put you into a category. I've been listening to a lot of Beatles lately and the Beatles directly stole from the Beach Boys and vice versa. Or the Rolling Stones stealing "Love in Vain" from Robert Johnson.

Boston: One song always leads to another thing and then you find yourself in this new style where you write a few songs that came from something you heard somewhere else. I think it would be a shame if musicians held themselves back from experimenting with what influences them. —Joe Meno

"We're kind of badass."

THE GOTHAM GIRLS BRING ROLLER DERBY BACK TO NEW YORK CITY.

On a brisk October Saturday, 17 roller-skating women with names like "Chassis Crass" and "Sybil Disobedience" gathered beneath a Brooklyn highway overpass to breath life back into a beloved American tradition that many thought died long with stonewashed jeans and crimped hair: the All-Girls Roller Derby.

In the '50s and '60s, female derby teams from California to New York skated for supremacy in venues as large as Madison Square Garden. But by the '90s, skating was kaput. Recently, however, a new genera-

tion of roller derby queens are elbowing and colliding their way back into the limelight. Teams bash in Chicago, Texas, Tucson, LA, the Cayman Islands and, of course, New York City.

The Gotham Girls Roller Derby was founded when David "Lefty" Leibowitz and Karin Bruce met on the Internet. Leibowitz posted an ad on Craig's List beseeching females to help found a derby league. Bruce spied the ad and gasped—she, too, had dreams of derby glory. Using Friendster, the pair recruited a fledgling team. They soon started

practicing three times each week at a Brooklyn roller rink.

"My first practice, I came in expecting everyone to be aloof and bitchy, but they were the nicest group of girls," says Nately Blair, AKA Ginger Snap. Contrary to stereotype, the Gotham Girls are far from layabout rockers. Among the Girls' 20-strong members are an actress, a public relations flak, a cancer-patient caregiver, and an economics grad student.

However, Blair is quick to add, "we're kind of badass. Even though we beat each other up on skates, there's still a sisterhood that binds us together."

The word is out—there's now a three-month waiting list to join that sisterhood.

Every week a new girl asks to enter the league. The Gotham Girls welcome any interested female, but a three-month probationary period keeps pretenders at bay.

The payoff is unique. Once "fresh meat" becomes a Gotham Girl, she selects a one-of-a-kind moniker like "Margaret Thrasher" or "Suzy Hot Rod." But to receive their name, fresh meat must attend 75 percent of the practices. Also, since some Girls are lifelong skaters while others are four-wheel newbies, they all must master a skill set: skate forward and backward; pop 360-degree turns; and properly tumble, "so they don't cause a huge pile-up," says Blair. Most importantly, each

Iceberg Town BY JOE MENO AND NICK BUTCHER

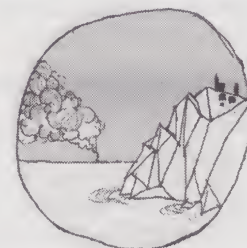
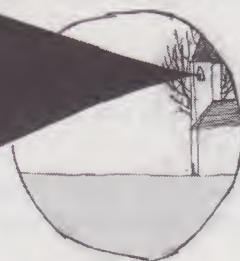
iceberg town



We escaped to Canada: but there were too many of us and the town drifted off into the sea



There was a family of polar bears living in the abandoned church: I watched them for hours



In the distance, manhattan was burning: I thought it was the Northern Lights.

girl must be able to leap over a girl sprawled on the rink floor.

"No one's volunteered to be leapt over yet," Blair says.

No one has volunteered a skating rink to hold the Gotham Girls' initial derby, either. In 2004, the Girls held fundraisers and publicity stunts—*Paddle a Derby girl for \$15! Bet on racing beauties for \$5!*—but few actual derbies. The Girls' have raised enough to cover health insurance, a necessary expense because injuries are inevitable. But even insured, the problem in Manhattan is twofold: space is at a premium, and "the second people hear the words 'Roller Derby' they want nothing to do with us," Blair says.

Even when they find a space, there's generally a problem. For example, the NYC Department of Parks offered a rink, but there was a stipulation: no selling merchandise—or beer.

"What's roller derby without beer?" Blair asks.

Luckily, the Girls discovered a Bronx rink that agreed to host their first bout, scheduled for November. The Manhattan Mayhem and Brooklyn Bombshells will battle, hopefully proving to detractors that Derbying includes "strategy and skill, not just posing and pummeling," Blair says.

This will be the next step in creating a fully functioning league. If the November event goes smoothly, they will schedule more events, and maybe even cross-country battles.

"That's our dream goal: to revive Roller Derby in all its glory," Blair says. "In a best-case scenario, five years from now we'll be traveling around the country as professionals, empowering little girls and being glamorous and sexy at the same time." —Joshua M. Bernstein

Planting a revolution

IN GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA AN ENTERPRISING BAND OF DIY BOTANISTS ARE FILLING THE TOWN'S STOMACHS—AND STREETS—WITH FREE FRUIT AND VEGETABLES.

Tired of corporate control of the food supply? Fed up with eating food that was grown thousands of miles away with huge amounts of fossil fuel in its production and transport? Well, in Gainesville, FL, we've formed a group that's creating positive alternatives by promoting edible landscaping and local, sustainable food production.

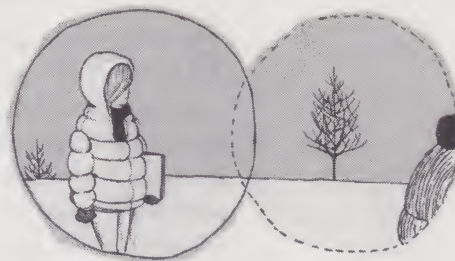
The Edible Plant Project of Gainesville was formed in spring of 2002 as a not-for-profit, volunteer-based effort to start fruit and nut trees and supply vegetable seeds for distribution to the community. To get our "seed money" for the project, we started with a

weekend of dumpster-diving, followed by a big yard sale of the loot we'd collected, which netted a few hundred dollars. We used this money to get a truckload of potting soil delivered from a nursery supplier, plus some pots and irrigation supplies.

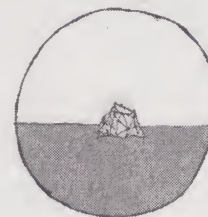
Then we started on the really fun stuff: starting fruit trees. Some of our favorites are mulberries, pomegranates, and figs, which grow and fruit well around here and start easily from cuttings. Wherever we located a mulberry or fig tree around town loaded with tasty fruit, we took cuttings and rooted them in the nursery to start new plants. Some



A girl named Elise asked if I wanted to trade records; I gave her the only Velvet Underground



I asked Elise if she wanted to go on a date.



she said we would all be dead soon so it didn't matter; I took that as a "yes"

fruit trees, like loquats, start well from seeds, so when eating fruit from the best loquat trees around, we'd save the seeds for planting. No matter how they grow, the basic idea was the same: find those fruit trees around town that do really well in this environment and start new trees from those using whatever method works best for that species.

Once we had enough trees started in our nursery, we started selling them at the local farmer's market, charging prices just high enough to cover our expenses. The goal of the project is not to make money, but to distribute plants, so we're always happy to donate plants to people free of charge to anyone who wants to plant some but has limited funds.

Most of the work of the project happens at regular parties, where we tend the plants in the

nursery, start cuttings, plant seeds, up-pot things, and weed pots. The whole thing is run on a volunteer basis: people donate time at the nursery or market, learn how to start and grow food trees, and in the process produce lots of fruit and nut trees for distribution. We've also started selling vegetable seeds, saving seeds from our own gardens of locally-adapted, open-pollinated varieties which do well in our area without needing intensive chemical fertilizer or pesticides.

The long term goal is to have food-producing trees all around town, in yards, street corners, and public places. Trees need to be planted only once, and they produce crops for decades, a freely given abundance produced locally that keeps us from having to support intensive agribusiness. —Craig Hepworth

"I think normal people are creepy."

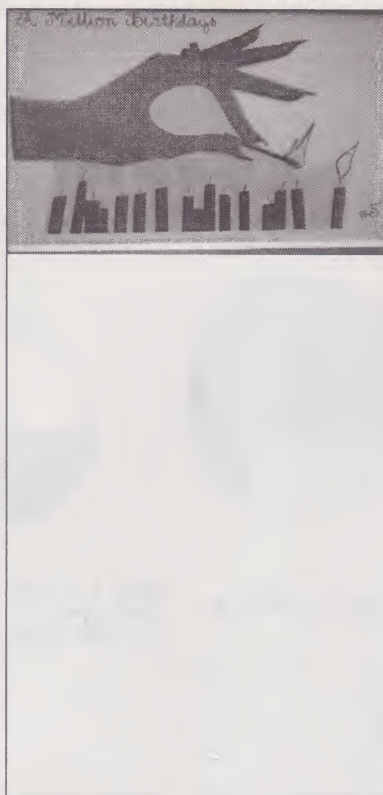
WHEN MARK WEGLARZ OPENED METAL HAVEN IN CHICAGO, HE THOUGHT HE WAS JUST FILLING HIS OWN NEED FOR UNDERGROUND METAL. HE DID A LOT MORE THAN THAT.

Mark Weglarz was like many discerning listeners of metal music. He was tired of snooty record store clerks giving him funny looks when he'd ask if they have the second Impaled Nazarene record; he couldn't stand it when Best Buy employees directed him to Home Depot when asked where the metal section was. But unlike many of us, Weglarz decided to do something about it. His answer? To open Chicago's self-proclaimed "headbanger's HQ," Metal Haven. Through single-minded perseverance and sacrifice, Weglarz has kept Metal Haven serving up the best "brutal shit" around for over five years—

and in the process, brought Chicago's underground metal scene to national prominence.

How did Metal Haven get started?

The main concept behind Metal Haven was the fact that I am an underground metal fan myself and I used to go shop all over the place in the suburbs and the city to find what I wanted. Any place that had metal I would go to on a regular basis to feed my fix for metal. When I was going around to all these different stores I noticed that they didn't have underground metal. The few stores that did have



“Most of the kids I go to school with don’t even know I’m still making zines.”

ZINESTER KATHEE TERELL’S SEW TRUE DISTRO AND ZINE A MILLION BIRTHDAYS ARE IMPRESSIVE ENOUGH ON THEIR OWN. AND THEN YOU FIND OUT SHE’S ONLY IN HIGH SCHOOL.

Running a distro is hard, but as a high-school girl living outside of Cleveland, OH, shelling out money for stock “that could easily be spent on music, books, and clothing”—Kathee Terell’s own description—seems downright fruitless. Yet Terell’s gone ahead and created Sew True Distro anyway, a zine and craft store that focuses on young feminist products. She’s even got a Sew True Customer Club (also known as the Seamstresses) that you can join for \$10 a year. She also publishes her own zine, *A Million Birthdays*. It’s quite an undertaking for someone who hasn’t even graduated from high school yet.

What do your fellow students think of your zine life?

I started making zines my freshman year of high school. My friend Kayla and I had a zine called *Headless Cupid* that we distributed to our classmates. Even though the kids at our school had never seen anything like a zine before, most of them were really into what we

some metal, were charging a lot for it. I wanted to open up my own place where I could offer a good selection of underground metal at a decent price.

So what’s the first step to starting a store?

The first thing you need to do is come up with a good concept. The *biggest* thing you need to do is come up with the funds. That’s the hardest part. That wasn’t easy, but eventually I got a bunch of small loans instead of one big one because nobody was willing to give it a chance. When I first started up I had 30–35,000 dollars in merchandise. That’s a lot of money when you don’t have that much.

Did you work another job when you started?

No, I do that now, though.

So how do you make ends meet, financially?

I only pay myself 100 bucks a week. Basically, that pays for food and beer. As far as rent and stuff, my part-time job money goes to that.

Is it hard to cater to such a small niche even though it’s a big city?

It’s a small niche, but Chicago is probably the largest underground metal market in the country. When I opened the store five years ago, Chicago was number two, behind New York and LA was just behind Chicago, which surprised me because there are more people in LA. Since I’ve opened the store, the metal scene in Chicago has grown. I think one of the reasons for that growth

is that the music is more accessible than it used to be. I’ve come across many people that were on the periphery of metal and wanted to get into the more specialized and underground stuff. I’ve seen people come in here that were just Blind Guardian and Helloween fans who eventually got into stuff like Marduk and Immortal. There are more bands now, like Opeth, who are helping expand the scene and expand the market.

So you want to expand the scene as much as possible?

Yeah! I just want to have all types of metal in one place. The beauty of underground metal is that it’s all not just one type. There’s power metal, black metal, thrash, death, gore, stoner rock . . . there are

so many sub-genres and categories and I love it all. There are people who stick to their one niche in the scene—people who’ll only listen to black metal or who’ll only listen to power metal. I have customers who only listen to brutal gore metal. But they’re in the minority, most people in the scene like all different kinds of metal and I prefer to cater to them.

Are you worried about competition at all?

Not really. There really isn’t anyone else who does what I do here. It’s flattering to hear that from the people who come into the store. People from other parts of the country, people who come here when they’re passing through Chicago, say that it’s the best place they’ve been to in the whole country. It’s nice to

were doing. However, I never got comfortable with the idea of sharing my writing with people from my "real life." When Kayla and I stopped doing *Headless Cupid*, I made it a point to really separate zines and school. Most of the kids I go to school with don't even know that I'm still making zines or that I'm running a distro.

How did your distro get started?

After *Headless Cupid*, I felt sort of burned out. When I was working on *Headless Cupid*, I wasn't reading zines written by other people—I wasn't even aware that there was an entire community of people making zines, so when I started actually reading zines, a few of them were so great that I felt like I really needed to be involved in the zine community even if I wasn't making a zine. Running a distro seemed like the best way to maintain a sense of community participation even if I wasn't working on my own written projects.

How do you decide what to distribute?

I make it a point to only distro zines that I can really identify with. I think zines have a great capacity to bridge gaps between people. You can read a zine written by someone that you have virtually nothing in common with and walk away feeling like you've made a new friend out on the playground.

Tell me about your zine.

A Million Birthdays started out as a one-shot. I had been reading a lot of zines and felt really inspired—that's another great thing about

zines, they're infectious. It's like a disease. When you read a zine for the first time, you're usually overcome by this urge to create your own. So, I did one issue and sort of forgot about it. After I opened up the distro, I was surrounded by zines all of the time and the zinemaking itch just got worse and worse, so I started it up again. I just finished issue five, actually.

What's been the most interesting part of running a distro, as opposed to being a zine reader or zine creator?

This sounds really cheesy, but running a distro allows me to connect with people and "give something back" to the zine community.

You're a 17-year-old high-school girl living in a conservative area during conservative times, yet distributing what many would describe as radical feminist literature. Do you think of what you're doing as groundbreaking?

In the grand scheme of things, I'm not sure that running my distro is really all that groundbreaking. It's just me and my friend Skot stuffing envelopes in my bedroom and writing HTML together. But becoming an active part of the zine community has really opened me up. I've learned a lot about communication, community building, personal politics . . . Any action taken to better yourself is a really groundbreaking thing. Running a distro, making a zine, and being a generally active and creative young person are all things that have made me a better person. So, I do consider my distro to be groundbreaking, in a way. —Anne Elizabeth Moore

hear that, and it motivates me to keep it going.

Is there a small network of people who run strictly metal stores across the US?

I'd say that there are 15 or 20 of them. I just hear about them through word-of-mouth. One of the places with one of the best reputations is a store that carries all kinds of metal, but also happen to have a huge

metal section, which is Amoeba in San Francisco.

Do you get a lot of creeps in here?

I think normal people are creepy. From time to time we get a customer who steps outside of the boundaries of normality, but just about everyone who shops here is like us.

—Dave Hofer

Clear Channel's new low.

ACTIVISTS SAY THE CORPORATE RADIO GIANT'S "BREAST CHRISTMAS EVER" CONTEST SCRAPES THE BOTTOM OF AN EVER-DEEPENING BARREL.

On April 18, 2005, the National Association of Broadcasters (NAB) will award Clear Channel Communications chairperson Lowry Mays

their Distinguished Service Award. This announcement came just days after Clear Channel's "Breast Christmas Ever" contest winners were

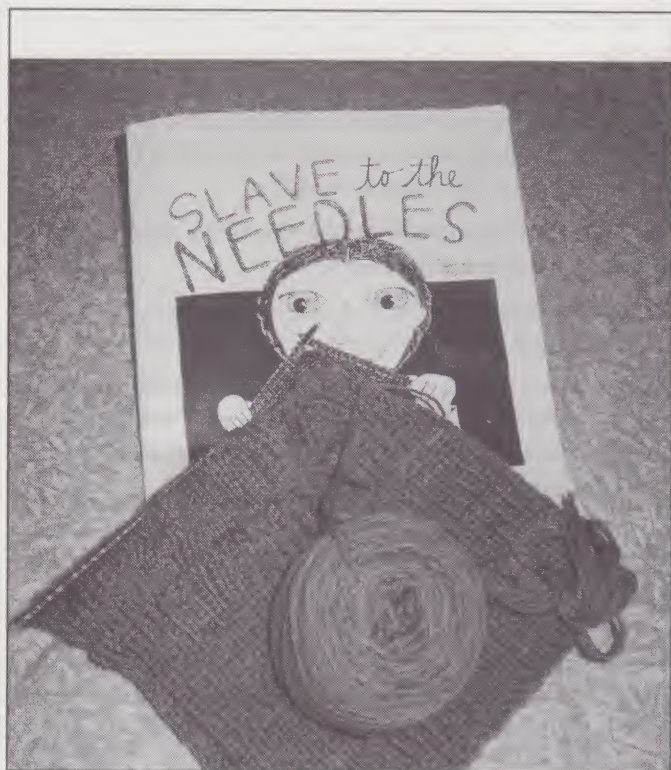
announced, in which 13 women in Detroit, MI, Jacksonville and Tampa, FL, and St. Louis, MO were awarded breast implant surgeries based on essay submissions on why the writers wanted larger breasts.

In response to the "Breast Christmas Ever" competition, the National Organization for Women (NOW) announced an Action Alert shortly before Christmas urging Clear Channel to abandon the contests. In support for the campaign, NOW cited high safety risks to women undergoing breast implant surgery, as well as various difficulties with the rules of the contest itself, which included allowing before and after photos to be posted on radio stations' websites, requiring winners

to cover all costs of anesthesia, and absolving the radio stations, Clear Channel, and the surgeons from responsibility with the surgery or its after-effects.

Despite NOW's protests, and a similar campaign from the National Research Center for Women and Families, Clear Channel's "Breast Christmas Ever" contest was enormously popular, and the Tampa station alone claims to have received 91,000 essays.

Such a high response rate appears to be what NAB is rewarding with its Distinguished Service Award. Not only has Mays "built from scratch a media and entertainment company that has changed the face of broadcasting and mass communications," NAB President



“Her political views creeped me out, but she was a remarkable knitter.”

KNITTING ZINE *SLAVE TO THE NEEDLES* TAKES A NEW APPROACH TO THIS OLD-SCHOOL CRAFT.

Five years ago, if you told me that I would squeal with glee when I discovered a knitting magazine, I would have said, no way. But Aimee Hagerty's *Slave to the Needles* is no ordinary knitting magazine. This 40-page Xeroxed love letter to all things stitched is full of interesting tid-bits in the form of interviews, essays, comics, lists, and scribbles. In addition to teaching the fundamentals of knitting and a simple mitten pattern, *STTN* includes patterns that you probably won't find in your grandma's knitting bag: a vibrator sleeve, a knitted thong, and a cozy for a birth control pill case. But that's not what makes *STTN* a page-turner, there's so much more to it. For Hagerty, knitting is more than a hobby; it's a way to connect with other people, it's a relaxing pastime, it's a great way to make nice gifts for the people she loves, it's a political act, and it's an alternative to supporting unfair labor practices. The proof is in the pudding: knitting isn't just for grandmas anymore.

How long have you been knitting?

I learned to knit a few years ago from a Mormon lady. Her political

and CEO Edward O. Fritts enthused when announcing the award recipient, but “his passion for excellence, his commitment to community and his support for civic causes make Lowry the perfect choice,” reported the broadcasting industry website, www.broadcastingcable.com.

NAB is the powerful lobby representing, in their own words, “the interests of free, over-the-air radio and television broadcasters.” This may be getting easier, for as Clear Channel accrues new stations—it currently owns approximately 60 percent of the US market, often controlling the majority of air waves in single cities—NAB really only needs to represent the one single company.

Activist Inja Coates of

Media Tank, a nationally respected media rights organization founded in Philadelphia in 2002 (see www.mediatank.org for more), has been organizing against Clear Channel for years. She argues that their ownership of over 1,200 radio stations—as well as the company's ties to the Bush Administration and their coverage during the lead-up to the war in Iraq—have turned the company into “the infamous poster child for everything wrong with media consolidation and the decline of modern radio.”

As this issue went to press, Clear Channel was also drawing ire for airing blatantly racist content and agreeing to team with Fox News who will provide news content to Clear Channel stations. This move

will further eliminate the availability of local reporting on news broadcasts in markets including Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Atlanta.

The official Clear Channel biography of NAB award recipient Lowry Mays describes his career as transforming “what appeared to be simply a radio business into an advertising company that continues to serve local communities and advertising customers. The company's cross-section of media and entertainment offerings include radio, live entertainment, outdoor advertising, and television assets that deliver highly targeted and effective demographics.”

Even more telling is what Mays explained to *Fortune* quite clearly in 2003: “We're not in the business of providing news

and information. We're not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers products.”

Clearly, Clear Channel's propensity to offend its listenership, ignore local needs in providing news content, and offer members of its audience the services of breast augmentation surgery is deserving of note—but a service award strikes many as ridiculous.

“The selection of CEO of Clear Channel Lowry Mays as this year's recipient of the Distinguished Service Award by the NAB,” Coates could only respond when asked about NAB's announcement, “raises the obvious question of ‘service to whom?’”

—Anne Elizabeth Moore

views creeped me out, but she was a remarkable knitter.

Traditional knitting magazine are filled with hard-to-comprehend knitting abbreviations and abstruse patterns. You don't do that kind of thing in *STTN*. Why not?

Abbreviations can be really useful in patterns, plus it's like this secret universal language of knitters. I think that's really cool, but there are times when I look at a new pattern and it has all this overwhelming shorthand, and I'm like, "Oh god. I can't do this pattern." The pattern is totally inaccessible if you don't understand the shorthand. I don't want that to happen to people when they read the patterns in my zine.

Aside from the very handy new gloves, sweater, or scarves, how do you think people benefit from knitting?

Doing interviews for the zine, I've talked to lots of people about what they get out of knitting. Like me, it seems like many knitters feel pretty empowered by the realization that they can make a lot of the things that are being sold to them at outrageous cost. It feels good to have another alternative to buying stuff from corporations whose manufacturing or hiring practices you don't agree with. Register your dissent by knitting the same hat they sell at Wal-Mart!

Knitting is such a time-consuming hobby, how do you make time for it?

Have you made it a social activity? Do you have a job that requires a lot of waiting? Or are you just totally speedy?

Writing a zine about knitting sometimes leaves very little time for actually knitting! But if you really love to do something, you can make time for it. I work in a women's shelter and I've spent many afternoons sitting around knitting with the women and talking. It's a good way to connect with people. At my last job, I facilitated a knitting group for homeless women. Sometimes I was like, "They're paying me for this?"

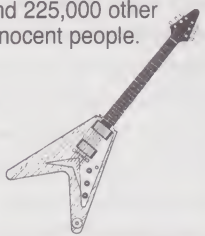
Would you call yourself a knitting activist?

A lot of people might think the idea of knitting as a political act is kind of ridiculous, considering its historical role in women's domestic work. But with the threats this country's administration brings to civil rights and to other issues that women care about—like reproductive rights and access to health care—well, we really have to be innovative in our political work and the way we create political statements. So many young people are out there doing activism in new ways. You can start a queer knitting group—that's a political act. Or knit something cool, auction it off, and give the money to Planned Parenthood. Can knitting be political? Yes! Is it also a hobby that keeps my hands busy while I watch *Buffy*? Also yes. — Cate Levinson

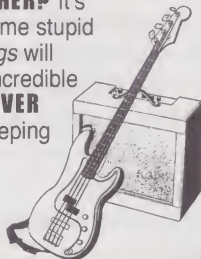
Get Your War On BY DAVID REES

PRACTICE THE GUITAR?

What's the point? Some gigantic tsunami will just come along and kill you and 225,000 other innocent people.



You need to replace your bass strings, but then again—**WHY BOTHER?** It's not like some stupid bass strings will stop the incredible **KILLIN' FEVER** that's sweeping the world.



Boo-hoo! Iraqi civilian casualties, illegal war, Halliburton, blah blah blah. **TELL IT TO THE TSUNAMI.**

WOULDN'T IT BE GREAT if this was your life? Just rockin' out with your buds and never leaving the garage to learn how many more people have died?



www.mnftiu.cc

Here's how I know there's no God: Bill Frist visited Sri Lanka last week and was *not* struck down by a last-minute micro-tsunami. Come on, now—even one of those little half-assed budget Greek deities would've whipped up *something*.



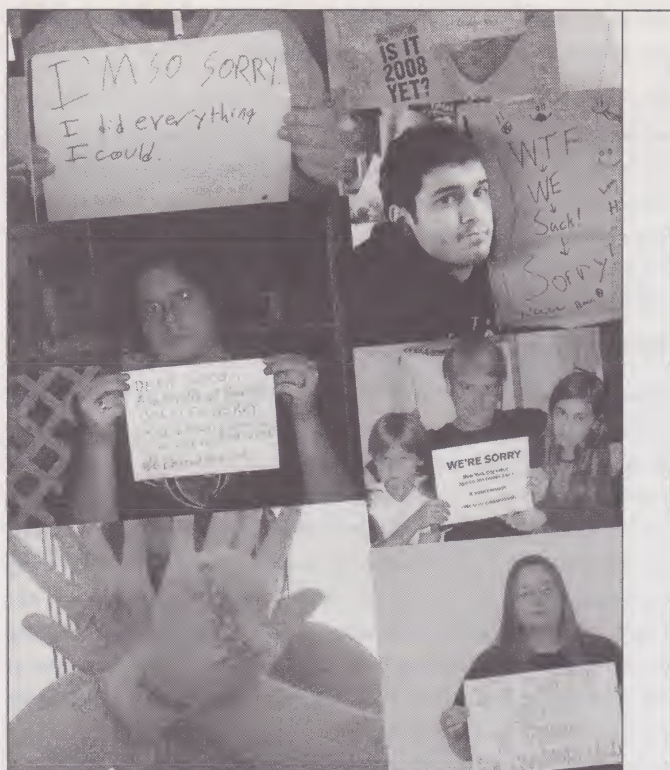
What, when Frist and his aides were taking pictures of each other by a pile of debris and he said "Get some devastation in the back?" Dude—do you have any idea how *awesome* that photo will look in his office?



Why didn't he just climb on top of the pile and hold the Ten Commandments over his head? You know that's the photo he sees in his mind.



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"An apology isn't an act of despair."

JAMES ZETLEN'S WEBSITE SORRYEVERYBODY.COM ALLOWS THOSE WHO FEEL BAD ABOUT THE ELECTION TO APOLOGIZE TO THE WORLD.

What's the first thing you need do when you know you've done something unspeakably horrible? You own up to it, right? That's what James Zetlen needed to do in the days that followed the election. Even though he didn't vote for George W Bush, he couldn't help but wonder, in horror and dismay, what the rest of the world must have thought about the election's outcome. After all was said and done, he felt the only way he could face another day as a US citizen was to face up to the fact that we really fucked up this time.

Zetlen and his friends got to work and launched sorryeverybody.com, a website where he—and anyone else who needed to—could post a personal apology to the rest of the world for the results of the 2004 election. To say the response was massive would be a ridiculous understatement. Within two weeks, the site had 15 million hits and 15,000 submissions. Since then, there have been a number of spin-offs, both positive (apologiesaccepted.com) and negative (werenotsorry.com). A book version entitled *Sorryeverybody: an Apology to the World for the Re-Election of George W Bush* (Hylas Publishing) came out at the end of January.

"Everyone knows who Taco Bell is."

FOR IMMIGRANT FARM WORKERS IN SOUTH FLORIDA, THE ONLY OPTION TO GET THEIR STRUGGLE FOR DECENT WAGES AND SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS NOTICED WAS TO MAKE A RUN TO THE BORDER.

The immigrant farm workers who make up the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) in south Florida don't have time to wait around for politicians to help them out. Regardless of who is in the White House, conditions are tough for farm workers in the region, who toil long hours, often exposed to toxic pesticides, and make an average of less than \$7,000 a year. The growers who employ them often refuse to give them their full pay or force them to work in hazardous conditions, and

since most workers are undocumented, employers threaten to call immigration authorities if they complain.

That's why CIW, a grassroots group formed in 1994 by farm workers mostly from Mexico, Central America, and Haiti, have taken matters into their own hands, fighting for improved pay, working conditions and human rights on a number of levels. The coalition lobbies legislators and works with the FBI to break up human slavery operations—which are shockingly com-

mon in the region—but they also target employers directly, marching in demand of justice on the homes or offices of contractors who have mistreated workers. Along with this strategy, CIW targets consumers of the produce they pick, with a specific focus on the Yum Brands corporation, owner of Taco Bell restaurants, the largest buyer of tomatoes from Immokalee.

"If you just target the growers, no one knows who they are," said CIW staff member and farm worker Gerardo Reyes, an immigrant from Mexico. Reyes was preparing for a 34-mile march to protest the Free Trade Area of the Americas in Miami last year. "But everyone knows who Taco Bell is. We won't stop targeting the contractors and growers, but

we also want to target the corporations that buy the produce and the consumers who can influence those corporations."

By enlisting public support, CIW hopes to get Yum and other corporations to demand that the growers they buy from respect workers' rights and pay a decent wage. Since Yum has so far failed to work with them, CIW has gained high visibility with a nationwide Taco Bell boycott. Students working in solidarity with the CIW have also managed to keep Taco Bell franchises out of over 20 high schools and colleges, either kicking an existing store off campus or preventing a planned one.

CIW recently had big victories at Notre Dame, UCLA, and Cal State San Bernardino. On March 7 through 21 of

Like so many people the day after the election, it seems you were going through some pretty overwhelming emotions, what was going through your head that day? What lead you to the idea for sorryeverybody.com?

Like a lot of college kids, I'd like to imagine that I can usually respond to trauma with good, or at least black humor. My first response to the outcome of the election was this strong desire to be blasé about it despite my horror and disappointment. I felt like there was some basic obviousness about it, something that didn't even need to be publicly addressed or acknowledged: we're bastards. The idea fell into my lap—how does anybody trace the origin of an idea, really—and I tried to get it up on the web as quickly as possible.

Do you think sorryeverybody.com expresses a sense of hopelessness and dread?

No, it does not express a sense of hopelessness: an apology isn't an act of despair—it's an attempt to begin the process of making things right. Sorryeverybody.com in part is an expression of frustration with all the political bluster getting kicked around these days. Much is said but little is done, and ultimately, the most meaningful message I thought that I could personally convey was a simple "sorry" and the rest of the message had to be action and responsibility.

2005, the CIW has planned a Taco Bell Truth Tour, with buses traveling through the South and Midwest holding events and rallies and then

converging at Yum's corporate headquarters in Louisville, Kentucky to demand a response from executives.

—Kari Lydersen

"The whole point of Vera is not to do what everyone else does; it's to undo it, rather."

A LOOK BACK AT THE SUCCESS OF SEATTLE'S AMAZING ALL AGES CLUB AND DIY YOUTH TRAINING CENTER, THE VERA PROJECT.

In 1991, the coolest town in the country was Seattle, Washington. Yet at the time, minors living here had virtually no chance of seeing or playing in a live band outside a basement thanks to the Teen Dance Ordinance (TDO), a law requiring a \$10-million li-

ability insurance policy and security by off-duty cops for any dance venue at which minors would be present. By 1994, only two concrete-floored, cramped clubs catered to minor audiences, usually hiring touring bands. Local musicians under 21 could play only at clubs will-

ing to risk their liquor license by ushering minors in for their set and back out afterward.

Are you kidding? Hell no! It felt fantastic. I was up for six straight nights setting up and maintaining the new website with a bunch of amazing people who I'm proud to call my friends. It took off like nothing I've ever experienced or seen. We crashed three servers trying to redirect the domain to more robust quarters. It was fucking awesome.

Are there other projects that you've seen that are similar? That you feel are coming from the same set of emotions that inspired your site?

Marryanamerican.ca often got featured alongside us in news stories. There is also apologiesaccepted.com, a website set up by an excellent Dutchman named Thijs Leydens that is in direct response to ours. There are more than I can mention, really. But what we have to be careful to avoid is letting this nascent movement degenerate into another round of Bush-bashing. Hurling insults and statistics and invectives only makes both sides of an issue dig their heels in a little deeper. It's come time to acknowledge that there are two major political constructs in American thought and that they are both worth a little bit of time and respect. Sorryeverybody.com may seem politically one-sided, but our ultimate goal is understanding and not one-upmanship.

—Cate Levinson

ing to risk their liquor license by ushering minors in for their set and back out afterward.

Enter the Joint Artists and Musicians Political Action Committee (JAMPAC), formed to abolish the TDO, which became law after a 1987 all-ages club bust involving the classic parental nightmares: drugs, alcohol, and teen prostitution. JAMPAC knew that if you did it right, all-ages music would enrich lives, not ruin them. Yet after years of fundraising, campaigning, and awareness-raising, a veto by former mayor Paul Schell (infamous for his leadership during the 1999 WTO riots) of a city council vote to overturn TDO, and a JAMPAC-sponsored lawsuit that ended back at city hall, it looked like the ordinance was here to stay

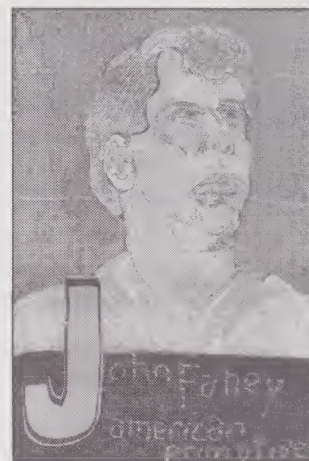
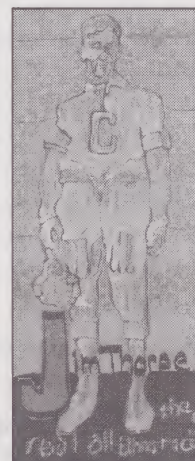
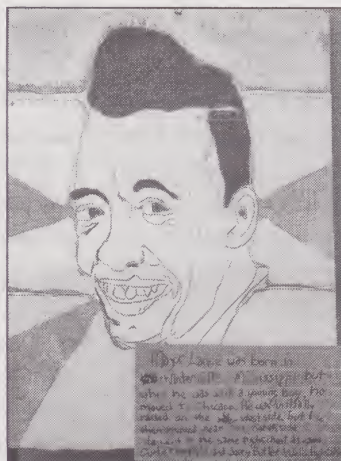
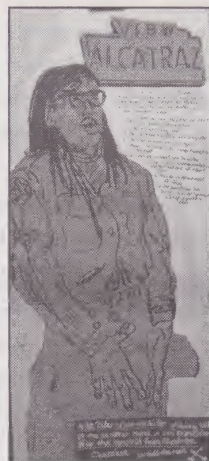
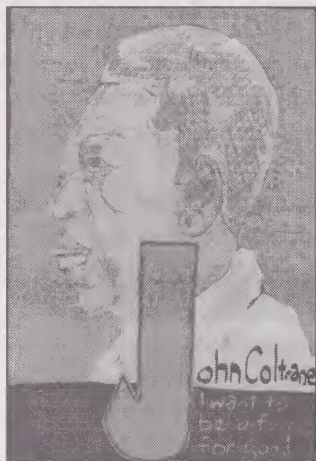
[for more about JAMPAC, read PP65's interview with JAMPAC co-founder Krist Novoselic].

But in 1999, two grad students from the University of Washington insisted to city hall that it could be done. Shannon Stewart and James Kebblas had visions of replicating Vera Groningen, a government-sponsored, youth-run music and arts organization in the Netherlands, in Seattle.

In time, and with help from a broad range of supporters, Stewart and Kebblas developed the Vera Project, a permanent venue and organization that leverages a small annual city grant into a budget six times that size, serving youth not just with weekend entertainment, but opportunities to learn musicianship and business skills, work independently, and par-

GALLERY: Lullabies for Heroes

ARTWORK BY TIM KERR



Tim Kerr began blending genres of punk and funk back in the mid-'80s with the seminal punk band The Big Boys. Now he blends acrylics and inks to produce paintings depicting the unsung heroes of cultural, social and political reform. View more at www.timkerr.net.

ticipate in and give back to the community. Through non-profit partnerships, young adults at Vera also organize benefit shows, rape and violence awareness projects, voter registration drives, and political film screenings. With Seattle's One Reel and Sub Pop records, Vera created training programs that lend professional festival organizing and musicianship experience—lending credence to live music as a legitimate field no longer accessed solely by scene politics and participating in less-than-salubrious activities.

At Vera, young people learn to run lights, book shows, do sound, jury art exhibitions—the list goes on—and then do it, at Vera and beyond. Ari Spool, 19, says she “aimlessly” moved to Seattle in 2003, knowing she “wanted to do something a little off the radar” but “had no idea what to do, or where to

figure out how to do it.” Spool volunteered to run the lights at Vera, then trained others to do it. “I’ve learned management skills, but not in that ugly business way,” she says. “Vera has taught me much more than any college could about the music business.” Spool has utilized her newfound skills to start an independent record label, Smug Life Recordings.

Vera succeeds by avoiding the chase for cool; instead, it fills the needs of the community left unfilled by other venues. In the words of Stewart, “The whole point of Vera is to not do what everyone else does; it’s to undo it, rather.” Oppressive social norms and under-representation fade when the “women’s history month philosophy” predominant in the music scene is “redirected to doing that work every day and in everything.” Balancing rock, hip-hop, punk, and

hardcore shows, and including female artists and artists under 21 on every bill, makes Vera a place for everyone. After three years, over 50 percent of participants in the sound engineering program are female, and a young woman now leads the program. Vera alumna Melissa Quayle has even been hired as production manager at Neumos, Seattle’s newest major music venue.

The success of Vera has not gone unnoticed. Vera’s 2004 government funding came through without a struggle for the first time; Mayor Greg Nickels also backs skate parks and other youth-oriented projects. In spite of the transience of politicians, Stewart is optimistic; she anticipates partnerships with other non-profits on a capital campaign that will encourage the city to help pay the rent. Vera’s current, low-cost lease on prime downtown

real estate expires in late 2005, making the search for long-term space their next priority.

Vera also receives in-kind support from community professionals including carpenters and network engineers who want to create a safety net for kids who prefer alternative after-school activities—and because new music and art keep Seattle alive and relevant. Ongoing financial support comes from the music industry, private foundations, and earned income from the door. Volunteer members also participate in the governance structure—meaning youth are also learning how to run a non-profit business. That reinforces the feedback loop: Vera participants will be launching festivals, campaigns, and record labels—plus leading non-profits and local businesses, including the Vera Project itself, for decades to come. —Daphne Adair ©

BRIGHT EYES

2 NEW ALBUMS JANUARY 25



Digital Ash in a Digital Urn



I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning

Containing what are undeniably his finest songs to date, *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* and *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* provide unequivocal proof that 24 year-old Oberst belongs to the lineage of great American songwriters. These albums are a soundly articulated slice of modern American life rolled into two very different records. The new songs are bursting with all of the rough edges and heartfelt poetry for which Bright Eyes records have earned their acclaim, while exposing a glorious new level of depth and texture to the writing and delivery. Recorded back-to-back and scheduled to be released simultaneously, the albums work in tandem to elucidate both sides of Conor's recent creative output. *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* is a country-tinged mélange of Conor's finest acoustic songs, featuring guest vocal appearances from Emmylou Harris and Jim James (My Morning Jacket), whereas *Digital Ash in a Digital Urn* is a more produced, band-centric album featuring cameo appearances by Nick Zinner of Yeah Yeah Yeahs.

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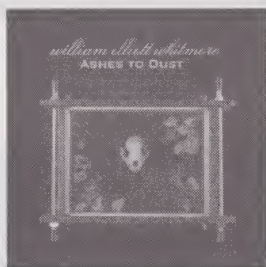
THE **moaners**

the moaners, a female rock duo featuring former Trailer Bride frontwoman **melissa swingle** and drummer **laura king**, unleash a batch of hard love songs on their debut, **dark snack** (produced by Southern Culture on the Skids frontman Rick Miller). From the opening yowl of feedback that precedes the album's pounding opener, "**heart attack**," to the sense of longing on "**talk about it**," this album is an exuberant expression of freedom and sexual emancipation - think Polly Harvey fronting the Black Keys.

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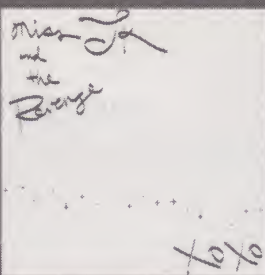
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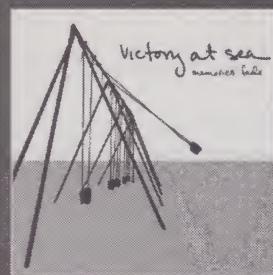
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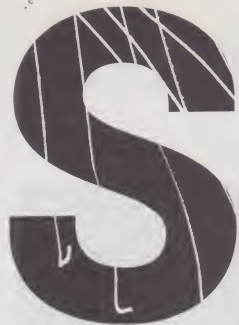
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S ometime around 1992, David Yow—the cowboy-boot-stomping, drunken-wailing singer for The Jesus Lizard—made a grown man cry.

"I was in Germany," Yow remembers, "I was at a bar talking to this local German guy and he said, 'When is Slint going to come to play? I love them. I really want to see them.'"

"And I said, 'Oh man, they broke up.' And he cried—he sat there at the bar and wept."

Yow's tale is perfectly Slint: It is instantly mythological. And instantly mysterious. Who is this band that made a man in Germany cry in front of a total stranger? Have you ever been to Germany? Men don't just sit in bars and cry. And over a band from Louisville, Kentucky? Impossible. But everything about Slint is impossible. Or seems that way.

When the band broke up in 1991, it had played about 30 shows—nobody, the band included, has a precise tally—and had released just one album, 1989's *Tweez*, on a label the band had invented and named after a friend: "Jennifer Hartman Records & Tapes."

The band was young—guitarist David Pajo and bass player Ethan Buckler were 19 when Slint recorded *Tweez*; Brian McMahan, who also played guitar and sang, was 18, and drummer Britt Walford was 17.

A second album, recorded for Chicago's Touch & Go label, was recorded in 1990 but released after the band's demise. That album, *Spiderland*, is where the impossible part begins.

First, *Spiderland* is impossibly beautiful. It is also—even today—impossibly unique. And, for a band that had barely ever left its Louisville-Chicago base, it was impossibly successful.

"It is very difficult," says Touch & Go's Miranda Lange, "to get press and radio to pay attention to a brand new band who doesn't exist anymore." College radio, she says, helped a little, but, she adds, "word of mouth was integral."

It is hard to track down what was being written about the band at the time, though it's safe to say that it certainly was not much. Most notable was a review of *Spiderland* that appeared in the March 30, 1991 issue of London's *Melody Maker*. Its fawning author was now-legendary recording engineer Steve Albini, who had recorded *Tweez*.

"*Spiderland* is a majestic album," Albini wrote, "sublime and strange, made more brilliant by its simplicity and quiet grace. Songs evolve and expand from simple statements that are inverted and truncated in a manner that seems spontaneous, but is so precise and emphatic that it must be intuitive or orchestrated or both."

Turning prophetic—sort of—he remarked: "In 10 years it will be a landmark and you'll have to scramble to buy a copy then. Beat the rush."

A landmark, indeed, but you'll have no trouble finding it—the album never went out of print. In fact, according to Lange, sales have increased with each passing year.

It all came as something of a surprise to the band. "It was weird," drummer Britt Walford says, "when other people started to seem like they were paying attention. It's mostly just been kind of cool that the records keep selling. That's pretty unusual."

Eventually, Touch & Go reissued *Tweez* and released a two-

song EP of outtakes. They're all still selling.

Meanwhile the band scattered, occasionally regrouping in bits and pieces: They took turns recording and touring with Louisville comrade Will Oldham's various projects; Pajo joined Tortoise and did stints with Stereolab, Royal Trux, and Zwan; McMahan started The For Carnation and played for a spell with Jimmy Eat World; Walford played in Bastro and Evergreen and recorded with the Mekons' Sally Timms.

But the long shadow of Slint always trailed behind them. Slint fans would corner them at shows. You'd hear about that band "with a guy from Slint in it." The band got together briefly in the mid-1990s and wrote some songs before dissolving once more into projects that were not Slint.

Late last year the band announced its reunion—for one show. They had been invited to play and curate the All Tomorrow's Parties festival in Camper Sands, England. It was the second time the festival's organizer had tried to get the band together; the first invitation, a couple years back, was declined. This time, the band's core members—Pajo, McMahan, and Walford—agreed.

One show quickly became two when the band decided to play a second show at London's Kentish Town Forum. The festival and the London show sold out swiftly.

David Yow, who befriended the band shortly after he moved to Chicago in 1988, calls the reaction to the Slint reunion "unprecedented."

"There's never been anything like this. A band plays 30 or less shows, probably to never more than 200 or 250 people. They put out a couple of records that sell OK—nothing incredible—and they break up. And 14 years later the next show they play sells 3,000 tickets in two days. Nothing like this has ever happened."

Soon Slint announced a batch of shows in the United States that grew from a handful to more than a dozen. Two sold-out shows at New York City's Irving Plaza—sandwiched between dates by Big Head Todd & The Monsters and Erasure—eventually became three.

Tickets—if you could get them—were expensive and available through Ticketmaster. The venues the band is playing are huge and—some of them—owned by Clear Channel.

But I am getting ahead of myself—there is still history to be told.

"IT SEEMED INCOMPLETE."

When Slint formed in 1985, they weren't called Slint. They played their first show during a service at a Unitarian church as "Small Tight Dirty Tufts of Hair; BEADS."

At the time it was just Walford, Pajo, and Buckler (whose dad belonged to the church). Walford was 15; Pajo and Buckler were 17. They had all played together before, in different combinations. Most notably, Walford, Buckler, and McMahan—who was the last addition to the band—were in the seminal Louisville punk band, Squirrel Bait.

Steve Albini first heard the band—they still weren't Slint yet—not long after their Unitarian debut when they opened for Big Black in Louisville.

"During their formative period," Albini remembers, "they had almost this heavy metal undertone. I thought it was interesting, but it also seemed unformed; it seemed incomplete."



slint

"The fact that anyone had even heard of Slint
would kind of blow my mind.
It still sort of does."

interview and article by Jeff Guntzel

The next time Albini heard Slint was on cassette.

When Brian joined the band and it became Slint proper, Britt made some cassettes in the basement they practiced in. The recording, Albini remembers, was “almost exactly like *Tweez* came out, I mean, the album sounded like a slightly gussied up version.”

How the album, recorded in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, “came out” was a matter of contention within the band. Buckler hated it—“Slint went to Chicago, got Albini-ized and fell down a black hole,” he told the band at the time.

“He would call me at my dorm,” Pajo recalls, “and talk for hours about the lack of mid-range in the recording; about how wrong it is to make a record without middle.”

Eventually, Buckler quit.

Almost two decades later, Albini has mixed feelings about *Tweez*.

“Oddly enough, I think the last time I heard the whole record I was in England making a record with a band called Bush. The band was sitting around talking about the record that we were making and *Tweez* in its entirety played while we were having that meeting.

“I thought it sounded all right,” he remembers. “My reservations about it have to do with the production decisions at the time. But, you know, there is a lot of *amazing* guitar playing on that record and there’s some really good drumming on that record. It’s a formative record; it’s a record from a period where the band hadn’t really crystallized its identity and I kind of wish now that it had been allowed to be a little bit more nude. I mean, at the time, they were trying to make a record that they would be engaged by and I understand that and I don’t think that I had an undue influence on it, at least I hope not. But they certainly made a much better record without me.”

He’s talking about *Spiderland*. “That’s the great record,” Albini says. “I think on *Tweez* they were still ambitious but—and I feel uncomfortable saying this—I don’t think they had that much confidence in their ability at that point.”

It’s a quirky record, to be sure. The first you hear from McMahan is a plea to Albini from the microphone while the band worms its way into “Ron,” *Tweez*’s first song: “Steve, these headphones are fucked up. It’s only coming out of one side . . . like the . . . should I just bear with it or what? Shit. They’re fucked.” Then a pause. “Man, no, wait, *please* give me some new headphones.” Seconds later he’s screaming the words to the song.

The next song, “Nan Ding”—every song on the album is named after Slint’s parents and pets—features a barely audible conversation that begins: “Hey, about that money thing—forget it,” followed by laughter and more talk.

“Pat” breaks down with what sounds like a Speak & Spell enunciating “TWEEZER FETISH” and “SNATCH BEAST.”

The music is a strange confluence of Big Black’s razor sharp guitar, ever-so-slight hints of an intimacy with heavy metal, and the “simplicity and quiet grace” that would haunt *Spiderland*, earning the band posthumous success and leaving its mark on countless recordings by numerous bands in the decade to come and beyond.

But in the early days the band affected only a tiny—if influential—community.

“BUT AS WE STARTED ROLLING THE TAPE . . .”

Bob Weston, at the time the bass player for the Volcano



Britt Walford, Brian McMahan, Dave Pajo

Slint has been officially back together for a few months now. How much of that time are you all in the same room playing?

Almost every weekend for the past three months or so. Before that we were meeting regularly just to discuss how we were going to go about it.

What was that like?

We’re all still really similar. I thought that time would change us more. I was afraid that I would be like, “Man I just can’t relate to these guys anymore.” But if anything, we all relate better than we used to. And it couldn’t have happened at a better time.

How so?

Personally, I was going through a lot and feeling really disoriented. It was just grounding to be with old friends that knew me. There’s a lot of unspoken stuff, and we haven’t kept in touch too much over the years so . . .

Nobody has been in touch?

I think Britt and Brian stayed in touch a little more than I did. I kind of got swept up in other bands. In the couple of years previous to Zwan and all of that I totally lost touch with everybody.

Before you started playing together again and you were just meeting up to talk, what were you talking about? Was it business? Was it old buddies hanging out?



Dave Pajo talks Slint.

It was more business. There was so much stuff we had to figure out before we played a note. We would get together on weekends and have these seven-to-10 hour meetings. It was pretty intense. There was a lot to think about. It was almost like starting a band from scratch.

What were some of the things you had to think about?

Well, we had to think about the best way to approach it: what kind of budget we required to do it, how we'd like to do it—ideally and practically—and, you know, who we'd have to hire to help us and what we were going to do about the bass situation. We had to figure out cases and how we were going to get around. There was talk about recording or filming some of the shows, so we had to discuss who was going to be behind that. ¶ And then there was figuring out how to recreate our old sounds. My old equipment was just shitty '80s gear that isn't even made anymore—it wasn't valuable to *anyone*. So I had to recreate the shitty equipment that I used to have. It was all sort of mundane stuff, but the band was always really detail-oriented.

Was it a lot of work to come up with a common vision?

That was a big part of it. Brian kind of saw the production on a grander scale than the rest of us did at first. We were definitely

like, "Let's just practice in Britt's parent's basement like we used to using whatever we have around." I think Brian had a little more of a grasp on the importance of the event. We had to come to a compromise, which I think is the best way.

Are you going to be together more as the tour approaches?

Yeah, we have rehearsals every day for about a month straight and I think the last two weeks are full production rehearsals.

What does that mean?

It means rehearsing on a stage with a soundman and crew to prepare for what it's going to be like on the tour. It's just to get used to what kind of environment we're going to be in. It's disconcerting to be practicing in a basement and then all of a sudden you get up and you're in this 3,000-capacity place and you're like "Oh shit. I have no idea how to deal with this," so this is just to get us accustomed to what the sound is like on stage and all of that stuff. It affects the way you play. ¶ I've had a little experience with "pro rock band" kind of tours with Zwan, and Brian has too with Jimmy Eat World. But Britt, our drummer, and Todd Cook, who is playing bass, I don't think they've done too much.

What was that like to be in a room with these guys again playing Slint songs?

That was really wild. I couldn't stop laugh-

ing. I kept giggling to myself the whole time we were playing. It was like being a kid again. I couldn't imagine writing a song like that now. The nature of the songwriting—it was naive in the coolest way.

How did you break the ice?

Well, we pretty much rehearsed old songs. We needed to find a bass player because Todd Brashear, our original bassist, opted out of the reunion. He has a kid and another on the way and a wife and a business that he started; he has a real life and he knew it would be way too time consuming. ¶ We knew we had to audition bass players, so we picked out five songs that would be representative of someone's bass playing. The three of us had to re-learn those songs so we'd be prepared for the bass audition. ¶ I was surprised at muscle memory. I remember trying to work on it a little bit on my own and being like, "Man, I have *no idea* what chord that was. I thought I was really clever at the time for making this really hard-to-play chord and now I have no idea what it is." But once we plugged in, it just came back—my hands just went right back to where they were supposed to be. And it's been 13 or 14 years since I've played some of those songs!

Was it a similar experience for the other guys?

I think it was that way for everybody. We were a band that didn't play live very

Suns—now Albini's bandmate in Shellac—saw Slint only once at a show in Cambridge, one of the band's rare ventures outside the confines of the Midwest.

"There weren't very many people at the show," Weston recalls, "I remember being completely stunned, confused, and mesmerized during it. In the middle of one song, Britt seemed to pass out and sort of fall onto his drums for a few seconds. Then he 'woke up' and picked up playing the song. It was pretty weird. I had never heard anything like it and it was *beautiful*."

Brian Paulson first heard *Tweez* "driving around in a Subaru with Steve [Albini] shortly after he had recorded it. I was into it. He thought it sounded too much like King Crimson. I saw them once in Minneapolis with four other people—two of the others being Nate and Ed from Urge Overkill. It was shortly after *Tweez* came out.

It was Paulson who would record *Spiderland*. The album, Paulson remembers, "was recorded over the course of two weekends with very little sleep involved—not exactly luxurious.

"The Jesus Lizard and Steve [Albini] were recording *Goat* just a couple of blocks away," he says. "We would bounce back and forth to see how the other team was progressing."

The sessions, Paulson says, were "a little tense. There was very little time to document what they had spent the better part of a year rehearsing."

The timeframe may have been short and the quarters cramped, but the experience was one Paulson will never forget.

"As we started rolling tape," he says, "hearing 'Nosferatu Man' and 'Good Morning Captain' spilling out of the speakers for the first time, I had an experience which has never since been duplicated: it was a distinct feeling of 'What is this? I'd never heard anything like it before.'"

Paulson was not particularly surprised at *Spiderland*'s posthumous success. "Not considering the huge impact it had on the few who heard it initially," he says.

Albini's initial response to the album was less decisive. "It was one of my favorite bands making a record. Listening to it, I enjoyed it, but it probably took me half a dozen listens before I got over the things about it that were initially off-putting.

McMahan's vulnerability on "Washer" was one of those things. In contrast to the obscured vocals on *Tweez*, McMahan's voice—and his words—were totally naked against a backdrop of achingly beautiful music: "I know its dark outside / Don't be afraid / Every time I ever cried for fear, it's just a mistake that I made."

"Bear in mind," Albini says, "that there was *nothing* like that at the time, so the first time I heard it, I was a little embarrassed for Brian. The way the vocals were presented it seemed like he was playing up the pathetic element a little bit. But listening to it a couple of times, that kind of becomes a persona in the song rather than this guy Brian that I know. And then listening to it a little bit more you realize how well integrated it is into the mood of the music."

Fourteen years ago, in his *Melody Maker* review, Albini was even more forthcoming: "the story made me sad," he wrote, "nearly to tears. Genius."

Spiderland's influence, Paulson says, "immediately rubbed off on the approach of many of their peers—you could hear it seeping into people's records the following year."

much and didn't record very much but we practiced a lot. I think all of that practice burned the songs on to our brains.

Slint has taken on such a mythical air since the band broke up. Did you guys talk about that when you were putting it back together?

We don't talk about that stuff too much. We understand that for a lot of people there is sort of a myth around the band that we wanted to preserve. We didn't want to exploit it in this disgusting way and we wanted to respect that people saw it as an important thing, so we wanted to make it the best we can. We just didn't want to bum people out and have them be like, "Man, I used to think Slint was great until I saw their reunion tour." Of course, when we used to play live, we rarely had vocals but now that has become an issue because people want to hear "Washer" with all the words in it.

It's a legitimate concern: It's a reunion, you guys are older—what if you suck?

Yeah. But in a way the hard stuff is already done; the songs are already written, all we have to do is learn them and perform them. The production on *Spiderland* other than the vocals was pretty much all live. In a way, there is not a lot to live up to there—as long as you play the songs right [laughs]. We *have* talked about rearranging some stuff because we aren't that into it, but we can't just start altering the songs according to our current tastes.

Is that tempting?

It's *really* tempting. There is a lot of stuff we'd change. There are a lot of songs we wouldn't even play if we took that approach. ¶ I don't feel like the Slint stuff was ever finished. The *Tweez* stuff we would evolve live. We'd change the arrangement a little bit. Even the *Spiderland* songs, I remember we were changing the arrangement to "Good Morning, Captain" every day until we recorded it. All the songs were still in progress; the recording session was just like a snapshot of where we were at that second.

I would imagine that presents a particular Challenge for Brian, whose lyrics on *Spiderland* seem very vulnerable, even spontaneous. Steve Albini told me that at first he was embarrassed for Brian.

We haven't even gotten to the vocal part



The covers of Tweez and Spiderland

"The Spiderland stuff is great, but I think it's more fresh in our memories. The Tweez stuff is kind of like going back to a different band."

yet. Originally, the vocals weren't spontaneous; they weren't a last-minute thing. Brian and Britt were writing words for the songs and recording them on a four-track before we went into the studio. But because it was stuff they were doing on their own at home, when we went into the studio it was kind of a surprise to the rest of us. But it wasn't something that we just kind of tacked on at the last minute. ¶ I can't really speak for Brian, but I would imagine that it would be hard to revisit those songs and not be the same person. Some of that stuff is pretty vulnerable, I guess.

How are you choosing which songs to re-learn?

It's sort of democratic; we vote on what songs we want to do. We realized that we should at least learn all of the songs on *Spiderland*. A lot of people aren't familiar with *Tweez* or don't like it. I feel like most people are into Slint because of *Spiderland* and we should at least know how to play those songs so we can build sets around them.

Is it strange to go back to the *Tweez* stuff? It's much older and you guys were all barely even teenagers.

It's almost weirder to go back to the *Spiderland* stuff. The *Tweez* stuff I still really like, I can still understand it. The *Spiderland* stuff is great, but I think it's more fresh in our memories. The *Tweez* stuff is kind of like going back to a different band. It's really fun. It almost seems new.

They are such different records.

They don't jump out as two different trains of thought when we play live. It

seems more cohesive. ¶ Brian reminded me of the songs we started working on after we recorded *Spiderland* and right before we broke up. We still practiced a lot and we were writing new songs. He asked me if I remembered any of those songs. I was like, I have no memory of those at all, do you remember what they sounded like? And he said, "Yeah, it was as different from *Spiderland* as *Spiderland* was from *Tweez*." I'd love to track down a practice tape of that just to hear what the hell we were doing.

When the Slint reunion was first announced, it was only going to be one show at the All Tomorrow's Parties festival in London, which you guys were picked to curate. How did that come about?

Barry Hogan, the festival organizer, had written us a couple of years ago and asked us to play the festival. At the time nobody took it very seriously. He brought it up again, but this time he asked us if we would curate. I talked to everybody and, surprisingly, everyone seemed into it.

So that was the catalyst for the reunion?

Yeah, it was Barry Hogan.

How did one show turn into a tour?

At some of our earlier meetings when we were trying to figure out the best way to approach it, we knew that if we were going to do this one show that we'd have to do it right. So we figured out a budget, but realized that for one show it would have been so much work and we wouldn't have made any money.

So if you were doing just one show you would have approached preparing for it pretty much the same way that you are for that one show plus a tour?

Yeah. If we were just going to play one show we would have approached it the same way. And so it was like, "Well, maybe we can play some shows in London to help out the cost—make it worthwhile for all the time we're putting into it." And then it was like, "Well, we can't play London and not play Louisville and we can't play Louisville and not play Chicago . . ." And then it was like, "Well, why don't we just go ahead and do a small tour?" But it had to fit in with Brian's work schedule. He could only ask off for a certain amount of time.

What does Brian do?

He's an electrician. It's a union-based thing and it's pretty demanding and pretty strict. He likes it and he wasn't going to give up his career for this temporary thing. We had to make it work with everybody's schedules.

So was it difficult for him to get time off even to practice? You guys are practicing a lot.

For the tour, he already had a break then so we knew we could only do the festival around the end of February. We originally wanted more rehearsals, but he couldn't take off any more time. I'm not sure how he does it. He wakes up at 3:30 in the morning and gets on the train and does his job until 3:00 in the afternoon and does all this Slint work and has a good home life. He just works really hard.

How are the practices going? Are you where you feel like you should be at this point?

It's going to get more like that. Right now we're just trying to shake off 13 years of dust and get a feel for all the songs again and then we'll probably go in and work out the details.

Are you nervous?

I'm always nervous [laughs]. I think I'm more excited than I am nervous. Even at practices after we've played a song a million times and I can tell I'm starting to get bored with doing it, I'm just like, "Man, this is really a lot of fun playing these songs again." It's not that I have to remind myself, it just kind of hits me: *how can you be*

KIDS FROM KENTUCKY

David Yow, who first heard the band when Albini was mixing *Tweez*, was struck immediately by the contrast of the music and the music-makers. "For being kids from, you know, *Kentucky*, I was flabbergasted by their creativity and their imagination and how mature their music sounded."

Yow and his wife became especially close to Walford. "My wife and I called him our 'sother,' a cross between our son and our brother." It's an endearing confession that underscores something the myth of Slint has obscured: these guys were *kids*.

That point is further cemented by a key piece of trivia: "Slint," Walford says, "was the name of a fish I had."

"They were all kind of quiet," Yow says. They spoke *really* slowly and were pensive, thoughtful, really chose their words well. They also had a bizarre sense of humor. Britt collected tweezers—he had a tweezer *collection*."

"They were smart," Albini says. "They spent a lot of their energy thinking up rather elaborate practical jokes and there was a lot of sort of specific-to-Louisville humor."

Before the Cambridge show, Weston remembers, "Brian and Britt showed me this series of posterboard signs they had been making on tour and putting in the back window of the van. I think one went something like, 'People are nicer back home.'"

Back home, of course, was Louisville. Albini credits the town with fostering more than just the band's sense of humor.

"Louisville's an interesting place," he says, "I can't think of another place—maybe Washington, DC—where the local identity sort of influenced every aspect of life. There was a really active and really creative local music scene that got almost no attention, even locally. There was no college radio, so you didn't hear bands on the radio—you heard bands at your friend's house. And you didn't go see a band because you read about them or heard about them, you went to see them because they were your friends. I think that made a big difference in how different trains of thought all sort of came together rather than being separated."

Indeed, a look at just a handful of the diverse, yet often interconnected, bands and artists Louisville has birthed speaks to Albini's point: Gastr del Sol, Rodan, Will Oldham, Crain, King Kong (a project of ex-Slint bass player Ethan Buckler).

But ultimately, Slint found itself in a fixed position in a universe with boundaries stretching well beyond a local or regional scene, genre, or even a particular era.

"There was a lot going on at that time that I thought was trivial," Albini says. "The beginnings of the pop-punk scene were developing and there were still the last vestiges of the rabid hardcore scene, both of which I thought were fucking retarded from the beginning. There were a lot of sort of ancillary things going on at that time but among the bands that represented something that was uniquely theirs—Slint is definitely one of them."

Yow agrees. "Nobody was doing anything quite like it at the time," he says. "People tell me that emo-rock—which I'm completely unfamiliar with—is sort of based on Slint kind of stuff. But any whatever-the-hell-emo-is that I've heard didn't compare."

Slint's sound "was uniquely theirs," adds Albini. "They weren't trying to do anything for anyone else's benefit. They had a wellspring of ideas that hasn't been equaled."

bored? *This is a blast and it will never happen again.*

How did you guys meet in the first place?

Britt and Brian knew each other when they were really young. They were in a band together when Britt was like 11. The band was called Languid & Flaccid and Ned Oldham from Anomoanon was in it. I think he was the oldest and he was like 13. They were just little kids in the early '80s in Louisville. ¶ When I met Britt, I was 16 and he was 14, I think. When his band broke up, I remember talking to my friend Ethan—who ended up playing bass for Slint and went on to be in King Kong—and we were talking about how frustrated we were with the music scene and how we wanted to form a band that was really different from anything else and I was like, "You should talk to Britt because that sounds like what we want to do." We ended up practicing and we all hit it off and started writing songs. ¶ The thing that I always liked about Louisville was that nobody wanted to sound like anybody else. If you came out and it was obvious that you were ripping off the Clash or Minor Threat, nobody paid any attention to you. The bands that had their own sound were the really respected ones. It seemed like a lot of the bands coming out were people we didn't know and the music was sort of generic, so I think out of frustration we wanted to do something that was really different from all that.

How quickly did you find that "something different"?

It was actually in the band previous to that which I was in with Britt, called Maurice. It was sort of a metal/hardcore band. We started writing these songs—Britt and I were really into the Minutemen and the Meat Puppets—where I had a clean guitar sound. It wasn't aggressive, but really kind of angular and bizarre. That's pretty much what broke up that band—the other people just couldn't relate, I don't think. ¶ We actually had a song that became a Slint song in that band—it's on *Tweez*, called "Pat." The song "Darlene" was the next song we wrote, I think. The direction that that band was heading with Maurice, we kind of picked it up again with different members.

You were still high school kids at this point. Did you have friends in the Louisville scene?

Yeah, most of our music friends were older than us and they were from the early Louisville punk scene.

Do you remember your first show?

Yeah, but we didn't have the name Slint yet. We played at a Unitarian church during the service [laughs]. Ethan's parents were Unitarian and they were having a sermon on rock 'n' roll music and they were like, "Mr. Buckler's son is in a rock band, maybe they could perform." We totally took them up on it. We were pretty loud back then and playing in this really small church. We set up these giant drums where the altar would be and we played three songs: one when the priest came down the aisle, one during the meditation, and one when he walked back down. One song was almost all just feedback—it was really cool. I think we were going to have Will Oldham sing with us and play guitar, but he had only just learned a couple of chords and it didn't end up working out. ¶ I still have the pamphlet that goes through the order of events. It says: "Rock 'n' roll music provided by 'Small Tight Dirty Tufts of Hair; BEADS'." That was the name we were going under.

What was the reaction?

It was a pretty small group of people. I was just trying to play the songs. The only time I looked up while we were playing I remember seeing some old ladies covering their ears and some little kids crying [laughs].

Did you guys get paid?

Hell no! I don't think we hardly ever got paid. We did a small tour and I'd be surprised if we made over a hundred dollars a show. The biggest show we ever played was opening for Urge Overkill in Chicago and we made \$250. That was the most we ever made.

That must have been exciting.

We couldn't believe it. I wasn't used to free beer or having a dressing room or anything. I remember walking in like, "This room is for us?" There was one of those trays that had beer in it. I was like, "Somebody left some beer here!" We totally started stealing it all—putting it all in our pockets. We just couldn't conceive of the fact that they would just give it to us. Or at least I couldn't. I thought: That's the big time, right there. Free beer and \$250!



Slint—then.

"The only time I looked up while we were playing I remember seeing some old ladies covering their ears and some little kids crying."

So Slint only ever did one small tour?

It was actually two small tours. Like 10 days out, a break, and then another 10 days or less. We probably only played a total of 30 shows in the four years we were together.

What were the shows in Louisville like? Was there a regular crowd?

Early on it was always a really small group of people, but towards the end I remember playing in a movie theatre and being surprised that there were a bunch of people there. We used to cover Neil Young's "Cortez the Killer" and this friend of mine, who is this big dude from the south end of Louisville, he was wearing a US Marines shirt and he said, "Man, if y'all don't play 'Cortez the Killer,' I'm gonna drop kick all y'all." It wasn't in the set. We didn't play it. ¶ We usually played parties. I think we played a couple of shows when a band had to cancel or something—we'd run over there and set up because we were going to practice anyway [laughs].

I get the sense you guys were—and obviously remain—pretty serious about practicing.

Yeah, but there was no agenda. It wasn't to play a show or to record so much. Mostly we would get together just to write songs. We spent a fair amount of time on small things, like little transitions between riffs. We'd spend an entire practice just trying to match the right note to what the bass was doing.

Is that unusual?

Compared to other bands I've played in,

there was quite a bit of detail that we spent a lot of time on.

Was it fun for you guys?

Well, this is kind of stupid . . . [laughs.] There was one practice towards the end where I think Britt, Todd, and I were playing the theme to *Batman*. We kept switching keys and making all these weird harmonies and just laughing. Brian went upstairs—you know, he'd come to practice and nothing was happening, we were just being stupid the whole time—and he listened to all of Neil Young's *On The Beach* with headphones. He listened to side one and flipped it to the second side and when he came downstairs we were still doing it and still laughing. [Laughs.] Sometimes I wonder if this isn't why Brian quit the band.

Another band breaks up over the fucking *Batman* theme!

Exactly. That will be the title of the article.

Reunion tours are often explained, sometimes inappropriately, as an "effort to close the book." Did the Slint breakup, which went down after recording *Spiderland* but before its release, leave things feeling unresolved?

Yeah, it was definitely like being dumped by a girlfriend without any reason. Like, [in a pathetic, just-dumped voice:] What? I don't know what I did wrong!

When *Spiderland* really started selling, it must have been that much more difficult.

Oh yeah, definitely. It kept reminding us that we never figured out why we weren't to-

"SLINT'S SWAN SONG"

By the time *Spiderland* was released, the band had imploded. McMahan had left and the others didn't want to continue as Slint without him. Rumors about the breakup found their way through the pre-Internet grist mill. One report had the band committed to a mental institution—it was rubbish, of course.

"*Spiderland* is, unfortunately, Slint's swan song," Albini wrote in his *Melody Maker* review, "the band having succumbed to the internal pressures which eventually punctuate all bands' biographies."

Little more is known about the breakup, and the band seems to want to keep it that way.

Today McMahan works as an electrician, Walford is raising a young daughter, and Pajo is busy with Papa M—his solo moniker—and a host of other projects.

For their reunion shows, the band auditioned bass players to replace Todd Brashear, who replaced Ethan Buckler after his post-*Tweez* departure. The band settled on Todd Cook, who had played with McMahan and Pajo before. Cook is on loan from the Glasspack.

"THE BUSINESS STUFF"

The band's current headquarters is a rehearsal space above the Metro, a long-time venue in Chicago's music scene, where the band will play one of its 10 US dates. Their practice schedule is rigorous—a throwback to the old days—and only gets more intense as the tour approaches.

"I think our favorite thing was always just writing and practicing," says Walford, who insists there is no other combination of musicians he would rather play with.

In a move intended to protect them from what Pajo refers to as "the business stuff" that can get in the way of the music, the band took several steps away from their humble beginnings and hired a manager, a booking agent, and a PR company.

This protective layer worked swimmingly—so much so that it took weeks to set up interviews with the band. Interviews were scheduled, rescheduled, and rescheduled again, always at the very moment the interview was supposed to begin. At one point, after a botched photo shoot (*Punk Planet's* fault), we lost one of the interviews—with McMahan—all together.

The protocol goes something like this: the writer talks to the PR person, the PR person talks to the manager, the manager talks to the band, and then their word goes back down the chain.

It was only once this writer broke protocol and went, cautiously, directly to the band that wheels started turning. The band responded favorably and things were relatively smooth from there. Pajo and Walford—McMahan was still not an option—were generous with their time. They were forthcoming and friendly.

I raise the matter here not to bellyache, but to point out the tension between two worlds. That tension, of course, is *Punk Planet's* beat.

Steve Albini has, from a distance, watched the business of the reunion come together. He sees a band he loves making decisions he can't support. "You have to understand, that's not them. They are normal, great, wonderful, gregarious, intelligent people. They haven't been a band for a long time and they probably have enough to deal with in that regard, so they've off-loaded

that responsibility.

Albini was initially surprised to hear of the band's reunion. "The door," he says, "has been open to them for a long time to play some kind of profiteer-type shows and they've all seemed happy doing other things." But, he adds, "they're friends and I can't really fault them for wanting to get back together and play their own music. It just seems normal."

The way the band is handling the business of the reunion, however, he finds disappointing. "There are associations with the band now that I'm not comfortable supporting. Specifically, the fact that they've sort of integrated themselves into this revolting industry—the underground music industry—the fucking pocket-watch-sized version of the regular music business that I find so revolting. But they are all my friends and I love their music and I think they're great. I don't want to put my distaste for the music business above my friendship for them—I've never really been in this situation before."

Albini would like to see his friends playing under "normal circumstances," he says. "I had amazing Slint experiences seeing them play where everybody was comfortable, where nobody had to spend \$50 to go to the show, where nobody had to deal with Ticketmaster, and where there wasn't a full-page ad in the *Reader* [a free weekly in Chicago] with this ominous all-black monolith saying: SLINT." These things, Albini laments, are "artificial" and "superimposed on the band."

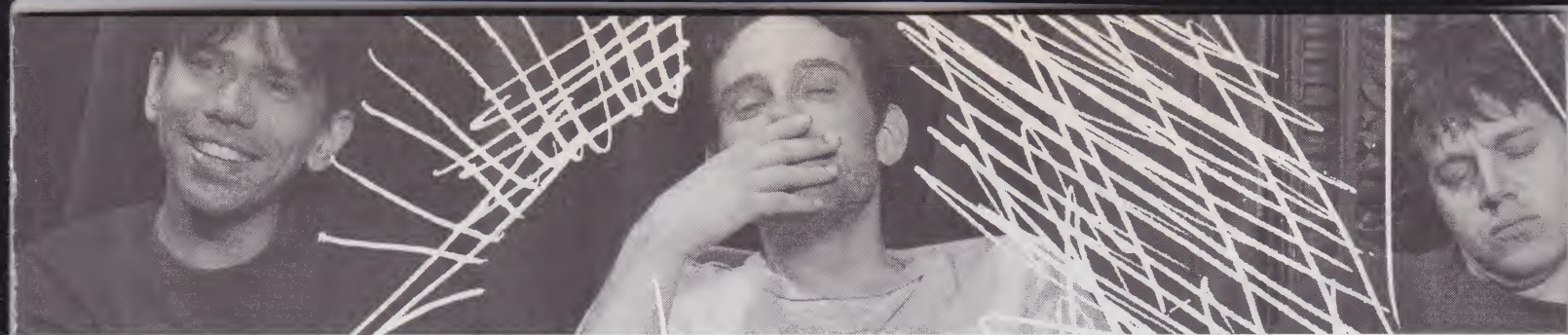
Still, Albini is not trying to talk anybody out of seeing a Slint show if they have the chance: "If nothing else, those guys play music in an utterly unique way. Britt Walford is an utterly unique drummer. Dave Pajo is an utterly unique guitar player. They *think* differently than everybody else that you'll go see this year. Seeing them play will be rewarding."

Yow, for his part, is ecstatic. "I'm so excited about all this," he says. He's planning on being at the festival in England and shows in Chicago and Los Angeles. "With their imagination, I bet it will just be great. And I'm not generally down with the reuniting thing—I think way too many bands who shouldn't be doing it are doing it—but this is different."

Albini knows what Yow's talking about. "I'm uncomfortable not wanting to go see this," Albini says, "because I kind of *want* to go see it. But I think I would be more uncomfortable during the show sitting there and thinking about all these external conditions that are preventing me from enjoying the show than I would just—" he interrupts himself, laughing, "I'd rather have them over for dinner, basically."

At the risk of sounding trite, there is something hopeful in that. Ultimately, this is a story about friends splintering off in different directions and trying to return—14 years later—to a familiar place. Surely there are things spoken of here, spoken of privately, or not spoken of at all, that have been misshapen by time and experience.

In the end, the reunion tour will come and go. The members of Slint will again scatter. A Slint-fan-to-be will saunter into a record store and pick out *Spiderland*. She'll become entranced by its ghostly elegance and curse herself for having missed the reunion shows. She might even cry, like the German. And she'll probably say something like: "Damn, I'd give *anything* to see that band." ©



"You know, there isn't anything grandiose about our story. There's no tragedy."

gether anymore. It's one thing to have a band break up and then never surface again . . .

Right, but Slint surfaced as a sort of revolution. Did you ever consider getting back together in those days?

We did briefly get together to write some songs in 1994 or '95. We wrote a couple of songs—one of them we talked about performing live—but that dissolved too and I was like, "It will never work, we'll *never* get back together."

What to you were some of the indications—other than royalty checks—that *Spiderland* was taking on life of its own?

It was actually playing in other bands and going on tour. I always thought Slint was this insular thing that some people knew about in Chicago and some people knew about in Louisville and that was it. Even when I noticed that the records were selling, I mean, I just didn't have any grasp on who was buying it or why. When I joined Tortoise, people would come up to me at shows and just talk about Slint. The fact that anyone had even *heard* of Slint would kind of blow my mind. It sort of still does.

Was it frustrating?

There was a time when I felt like I was existing in the shadow of Slint. I would walk off stage with Tortoise and it would be like, "Man, Slint was the best." I was like, "Man, I'm covered with sweat because I just played this show that you don't seem to have noticed." ¶ For my solo stuff, I didn't want to be "the guy who was in Slint." I don't really like it when I see "David Pajo, ex-Slint and ex-Tortoise and ex-blah, blah, blah." You know? I always wanted whatever I was doing to not be judged by something I had done before. I want it to be judged on its own merits. If it sucked as a record, just tell me

it sucked. It doesn't have to be compared to anything I did before.

Did that fade?

Yeah it did, mostly from working really closely with Drag City—trying to establish Papa M and all of that stuff as its own entity.

Once you're done with these shows, is that it for Slint?

Yeah. Unfortunately. It's been so much fun playing with them. I would love to write songs again. I feel like that kind of relationship is still there—it's really productive and creative—but I don't think it will happen just because of Brian's work. The only way I could ever see us doing anything again would be if we did a soundtrack or wrote some music specifically for something. I don't think we would ever play live again. And it would be something that we could spend a couple of years on [laughs].

You guys are treating this tour, as you said, like a "Pro Rock Tour." You have a manager, a booking agent, and a PR guy in New York. But, oddly, you are only doing two interviews. This is one of them and it was really tough to nail down. What is behind that?

You know, there isn't anything grandiose about our story. There's no tragedy. Initially we weren't going to do any press at all. We thought the only reason would be to let people know that the tour was happening. It would suck to be a huge Slint fan but not really in the music world or in the inside loop and totally miss it, so if we were going to do press at all would be just for that reason. But then we talked about it some more and we thought it was in keeping with Slint for it to be just a word-of-mouth thing because we didn't want to mess with the myth or anything. But then we decided to do some interviews but we wanted to be really

selective about it. We only wanted to work with writers that were into it and who knew about it, but also would expose the tour to people. ¶ And also—especially right now—I feel like our ability to practice and just work on the music has suffered because we've been dealing with so much business-type stuff, like just trying to work out the logistics of getting an old band back together. ¶ We have a manager that we hired to make things easier and he's been a great help but he knows that we're control freaks so he has to come to us with any decisions and we end up not being able to practice. I feel like if the music suffers because of the business stuff there is something wrong—especially if you have people working for you so that you can concentrate on the music.

Tickets for your shows range from \$35 to \$50, unusually high for a Touch & Go band. Was the band part of that decision?

We didn't really talk about ticket prices; we wanted to leave that up to the booking agent. It was this thing where we don't really know about how to book shows and so we'll just leave it up to someone who does. But we did want to kind of auction off the band in a way. I know it sounds like sort of a sellout thing to do, but if we took the approach that we would play more interesting venues or that we would play any town that asked us, we'd end up being on tour for a long time. We had to be selective: just go with the best offer. ¶ I remember when Big Black broke up they did this tour where they kind of said, "We'll play anywhere to the highest bidder." And they ended up playing some cool places. I think they played on a boat at one point.

You guys didn't end up on a boat.

No, we ended up with Clear Channel. Times have changed. ©

BABY

TEETH



Imagine all the bad, bad pop music you've been forced to listen to. Maybe it was the fault of an older sister who forced Olivia Newton John upon you. Maybe it was that week-long cross-country car trip with your family where your mom and dad sang Elton John day after day. Maybe it was a senseless friend who preferred the worst of rap-metal or an unkind boss who blared the Carpenters. Or, let's face it, maybe it was your fault, maybe you just didn't know any better, and Andy Gibb was featured prominently on your tape deck at some low point in your young life.

Now imagine the complete and total opposite of all that bad music. Imagine if you took the best moments of those terrible, terrible pop songs—the moments where, flipping through the radio, you pause for a few seconds and listen and are surprised by what you hear. Imagine that and you'll have a sense of the band Baby Teeth.

It's as if this Chicago trio with their wailing vocals, high-toned keyboards, thoughtful drums, and brilliant bass have taken the most interesting musical notions of pop music from the '60s, '70s, and '80s, and have created something new and exciting from a few nearly useless, almost obsolete parts. Very simply,

their self-titled record "Baby Teeth" is a collection of pop songs that give you no reason to be ashamed to sing along.

I spoke with Baby Teeth keyboardist and vocalist Pearly Sweets about why pop music is still something we need.

Interview by **Joe Meno**

Photographs by **Laura Sweeny**

Unlike a lot of other musicians, you didn't really grow up playing in bands; you worked on your music in secret, at home alone. What were you imagining on your own?

The music I was making was much more epic than what my friends were doing in bands because they were doing punk shows in people's basements and listening to Minor Threat. To me that was something that felt less grand than what I was thinking. At the time, I was writing these eight- or nine-minute piano ballads. One of my first songs was called—in parentheses—"(Unloved On) Valentine's Day." I remember at the bottom of that page I drew three faces: Elvis Costello's face, Loud Reed's face, and the third one was maybe the girl I wrote it about. But it was very important to me that I have this direct line to my heroes.

This is in junior high? You were already aware of Lou Reed?

He was a hero to me. But I was into like Lou Reed in the '80s: *New Sensations*, post-*Transformer*.

Where were you getting this music from?

I bought the Lou Reed box set for my dad's birthday and I stole it from him. I think I gave him a dubbed copy on tape as a formality.

Who else was part of that early inspiration you were drawing from?

The Stax singles were my punk rock because the forms of those songs were so simple. That's what saved me from going off the prog-rock deep end. Lyrically, I'm a huge fan of the Stax stuff and also the Phil Spector stuff. There has to be something really innocent and naive about your perspective of the world—and in my case, melodramatic as well—for you to even want to attempt to connect with people in that way. You have to be so idealistic and such a crybaby in some ways. In pop music, even though it's adults singing it, it's really a 13-year-old's part.

That's probably why it's still important.

"LET'S TAKE THE PART OF THE SONG THAT'S MOST EMBARRASSING AND MOST NAIVE, AND LET'S MAKE THAT THE CENTERPIECE OF THE SONG."

I think so. We have to be careful here to not make this discussion of top 40, because I think top 40 is now the province of middle-aged men. They come up with the vision, they come up with the business model, and then they fill in the blanks with who's going to do this. The most unmitigated feelings of being a teenager is in music that's *not* by top 40 artists.

So would you call Baby Teeth pop music then?

Yes, because that's a label I give to music that I love. I wanted to have a band that sounded like it had been sealed inside aluminum for many years and suddenly they crawled out and they really had no idea what was going on, but they thought if they just smiled a lot, that they would get through the night and then they could go home and read the newspapers from the past 30 years.

Baby Teeth's music is so *pleasing* it's shocking. It's not noise, it's not a cacophony, so your ears aren't necessarily used to hearing that, especially at a live show.

I think everyone who's ever gone to a rock show knows what it's like where you see the band you wanted to see and there's a moment where you think, "Wow. Why couldn't they have done a whole set of *that*?"

Not too get too abstract about it, but that's

how hip-hop started, too. You find your favorite five seconds of an old soul record and say, "What if we just made *that* the song?" ¶ With Baby Teeth, in the context that people have been talking about it and writing so far, has been that it is pop of the indie variety. "They're period-oriented and very ironic." If that's what people need to do to get a handle on it, so be it. Certainly in my head, that's the furthest thing from it. Every other band I've been in has been a response to what's going on. This is, pretty directly, just a transmission of what I want to do. I'd like to think that if anybody, pretty directly, did what they wanted to do, that would be the thing that shocked people the most.

How do the other members of the band factor in to this musical vision?

I got to know Peter, the drummer, and we would always find ourselves talking about top 40 all the time. We both listened to the "Drive," a pop radio station in Chicago, and all this super nerdy stuff. Jim, the bass player is one of the best musicians I've ever played with. He's the one who says, "Let's take the part of the song that's most embarrassing and most naive, and let's make that the *centerpiece* of the song."

What's the song that stands out for you that

represents the idea of the band as it stands right now?

"End of Actress." It's the one that starts, "Walking down the coast of Arizona . . ." There's always a part of me that feels like if you don't cry while you're writing a song, it's probably not worth it. There was a song we used to do in my previous band, the Platonics, called "Actress." I always imagined that that song was about this amazing relationship starting. This other song is a kind of epilogue of how everything kind of went to shit. I came up with this song as an extended coda to this other song.

Even though it was in your previous band?


Yeah. Which is extremely masturbatory. "Here's a song that's a response to another song I had."

But there's also something really charming about that.

In some ways it's still a very seventh grade conception of the music world. I'm going to create these characters that move from song to song, these epic stories that go on for five or 10 years, just like Lou Reed or David Bowie. For me, it's always been very important to envision the possibility of speaking to people on the level that my heroes of seventh grade did. ☺







My road was chosen
before I decided to walk it.

nick tilsen

On this land they fought and on this land they are buried.

A 22-year-old student at Oglala Lakota College, Tilsen is also director of the Economic Justice Project of the Lakota Mall and a member of the grassroots youth organization Lakota Action Network (LAN). LAN's mission is to foster creative and strategic campaigns that build and defend the Lakota Nation. They protect sacred sites, land, ecosystems, and the Lakota way of life. LAN seeks to increase Lakota sovereignty and, through their three initiatives—youth leadership development, educational outreach, and training—focus on developing youth activists, fostering a network of youth leaders, and creating a curriculum for local schools that educates people on the history of land succession and the history of the Black Hills. LAN is also spearheading three campaigns (Black Hills logging, wind powering the Lakota Nation, and stopping the legalization of alcohol sales) which show the diversity of work being done by Lakota youth to reclaim their sovereignty and their land.

Nick Tilsen comes from an amazing family. His maternal great-grandmother was Meridel LeSeur, the renowned writer, poet, Wobly, and political activist from Minnesota. His paternal grandfather is Ken Tilsen, a civil- and political-rights lawyer who has defended activists ranging from the Wounded Knee cases in the mid-1970s to farmers opposing a high volt-

age electrical power line through their lands. His mother is Joanne Tall, a longtime Lakota activist and winner of the 1998 Goldman Environmental Prize for her work in opposing a toxic waste dump on the reservation. His father is Mark Tilsen, a dedicated political activist who often works behind the scenes raising money and awareness and encouraging other activists.

Raised between Pine Ridge and the Minneapolis/St. Paul metropolitan area, three years ago Tilsen returned to the reservation to live permanently. He was raised between two worlds: raised by his father and a large extended family of political activists in the Twin Cities area, Tilsen reflects the dichotomy between a Native activist family's teachings and the experience of attending an affluent school in Minnesota. At Oglala Lakota College in Kyle, South Dakota, Tilsen studies Human Services and Lakota Studies. The college includes both a conventional university curriculum as well as a Lakota-centric set of teachings.

Tilsen and many other young Native students look at the two worlds they grew up in and attempt to sort their way through them. I interviewed Nick Tilsen about how a generation of Native organizers takes up the work for the people and the land.

Interview by **Winona LaDuke**

Illustration by **Dustin Mertz**

It's spring on the Pine Ridge reservation and Nick Tilsen's woodpile is down. The dogs scatter in the yard as we appear at his house near Porcupine, South Dakota. After some tender loving care and a lot of renovation work, Tilsen's finally restored the house his parents lived in when he was born. "This place was totally abandoned. All the local people knew that no one lived here," he remembers. "It was a party house, full of weeds and appliances. I spent the first six months hauling trash out of here and towing all the cars out of here. I didn't even work on the house for six months. I just cleaned up the yard."

I've known Tilsen since he was diapered, known his parents even longer. He is a shining and complex leader of the next generation of Native movements. Tilsen's ancestors on his mother's side are all from this community: first class patriots of the Oglala Lakota Nation.

What made you decide to come home to Pine Ridge after so many years away?

My brother. He's probably the reason that I moved back. For a long time, I thought about it, then my brother, Eli Batteise passed away and that was it. I said, *I'm moving back*, and about a month later, I moved back. My whole *tiosapaye* [extended family network] is from Manderson, but I'm from here in Porcupine. This is where I was born.

How did being raised by an activist family affect you as you grew up?

There comes a point where you come from the families who are marching, and you wonder why you are marching. You see that the things they are teaching in school are totally opposite to what you are learning at home. In the rest of the world you see that everyone else is buying the lies, so you get angry. You ask yourself, "Am I going to become numb to it?" or, "Why should I do anything about it?" That's the point I came to in high school. Like, "Why is this my responsibility?" Then you either become numb or really angry and then get active.

So you felt a disconnect between your home education and what was going on in school?

Yes. I remember in high school, they had somebody from the State Department come to talk to us about what an exciting time this was in the world. He was talking about globalization and how exciting it was to be part of corporate America. I almost lost it on him. I said, "You came here to tell us that it's nice if you are a rich white man. That's why you are here to talk because this community in Stillwater is where the rich white men my age live.

That's why you don't come to a community of color or an impoverished community to talk." I wasn't afraid to stand up because I was already different: I was an Indian.

How did you become politicized?

I was there from the start. Three years ago, I was in my house in Minnesota and I had this dream. I dreamed that I was a little baby, like three years old, and I was in a seat belt in this black van. And there were people all over the place and there was a stage, and my mom and dad were talking. I hated the fact that they locked me in this van. There was all kinds of confusion in the crowd and someone came in and a tear-gas canister filled up the entire van with gas and they couldn't get me out of my seat belt. I told that story to my dad and he said, "That wasn't a dream; that was a memory. That happened to you at Sioux Falls State Penitentiary. There was a demonstration there and they tear gassed us." I remember my mom was holding me and my whole face and my eyes were puffed up. They said it could have killed me, because I was only a baby. So what I am saying is that my road was chosen before I decided to walk it and these struggles have been a part of my life since birth.

Who are some of your mentors today?

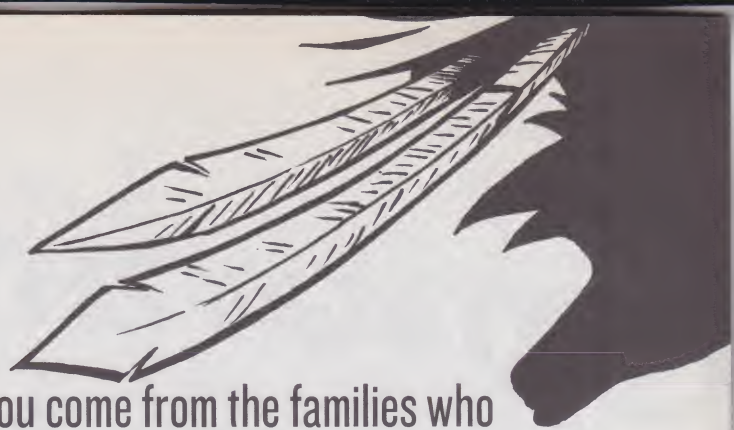
Charmaine White Face is a good leader; she's humble and powerful in her own way. She's a good writer and she's my auntie. Her work with Defenders of the Black Hills is really good and I was there when we founded it. Also, Tony Black Feather—he's an elder and one of the leaders of the treaty council. Karlene Hunter, Lakota Businesswoman of the Year 2004, is an amazing leader; she's

humble, she knows business, and she knows what needs to be done.

Whom do you admire most in the world?

I was once asked whom I would call a hero for the rest of my life. After reading, writing, and talking a lot, I came to a conclusion. I found somebody that I respected, that I could talk to and turn to for advice, who fought for justice and rights. Somebody who created positive change for people of all races, ages, and sexes. Somebody who never judged people because of their backgrounds, but for the people they are. That somebody is a man by the name of Mark Tilsen. He's my hero—but even more importantly, he's my dad. ¶ Throughout our hardships as a family, he has always stayed real and stayed true to his three kids and himself, as well as everybody with whom he worked. He has shown me what respect means, what love is, and what family means. He has made sacrifices when they needed to be made. He raised three kids on his own, something that many men don't do. He was essentially both my mom and dad. ¶ He raised us three kids and managed to create positive change on so many different levels. He coordinated, fundraised, participated in, and organized countless protests and benefits for a number of different causes. He's not a talker, but a *doer*. He's the type of person who would organize a huge benefit and raise money for family farmers and indigenous peoples. But he would also be the one to knock on your door to make sure you had food on your table and clothes on your back.

How did you become involved in youth organizing?



There comes a point where you come from the families who are marching, and you wonder why you are marching.

What actually got me started doing work with youth was all the work that I am doing with Lakota Mall and Lakota Express, two local businesses on the reservation. I have always been the only young person there, and about three years ago, Tony Black Feather from the Lakota Treaty Council said, "We're getting old. All the elders are dying off. When we die off, we're taking knowledge with us. This work *has* to continue. This treaty council was formed in 1894 and has to continue and one of the things that we've been bad at is getting young people involved." And so I said, "Of course I will help." ¶ A year after that, I went to the first Permanent Forum for Indigenous People at the United Nations. I went with Clifford White Eyes, Tony Black Feather, and Charmaine White Face to learn more about that work. I was always questioning it: "How does that help our community, and how does that help the people who don't have propane, who don't have food? How is that going to change the US? How is that going to make a difference to us?" I was the biggest critic of that work, but then I started seeing that it's a holistic thing. No one kind of work is better than another kind of work. There's cutting wood for an old person, taking that wood to an old person, going to the United Nations, or writing letters to your Congressman about a Head Start program—it's all the same. I am so rooted in my community that I might not be the one who goes to that international forum, but I can get other youth to be a part of this and maybe they can go instead.

So how do you get other Native youth involved then?

By and large, Indian Country is young. Half of the Pine Ridge Reservation is under 24. That means that there is a lot of potential in youth organizing work. We had a big treaty council coming, so we said that we'll put together a youth gathering. It was not so much for politicizing kids, but instead taking kids that are already politicized and saying that this work has been here for over a hundred years, and this work needs to continue. I wanted to concentrate on getting some youth to continue the work of the Lakota Treaty Council and also to get them involved as Defenders of the Black Hills, whether it was writing letters to Senator Tom Daschle and Representative Tim Johnson.

How did it go?

We introduced each other and talked about the state of our people, we talked about what's happening in the world with global warming and how we feel as young people that the earth is losing its ability to handle human life. We talked about our role as young Lakota people on this community level, as a nation, and what happened in our families; our families were really destroyed and damaged in history and we carry that same pain in our families. We talked about how we needed to keep on working for our families. ¶ During the second day we decided we wanted to spend time on the top of *Hinhan Kaga Paha*, or Harney Peak. When we headed there, we knew the rangers were going to stop us at the gate and tell us to pay to get in. We knew that we needed to make a consensus on not paying, to say instead, "We have a right to be here, this is in our treaties." ¶ So we went up there and the rangers did

come up and told us we had to pay. We told them that we didn't have to pay, and they would know that if they knew history. The ranger asked, "Did you make pre-arrangements with the Park Service?" I said, "I'll tell you what—if the head of the Park Service wants to talk to us, tell them to meet us at the top of Harney Peak." Then came the second car traveling with us. There were some people in that car who didn't know the treaties as well, so the driver just said, "We're with them. We won't be paying today." ¶ We hiked all the way to the top and we talked about how when we all stood together we were strong. When one person went through by themselves later on, they got discouraged and paid their way in. As young people, when we stand together, we're stronger—that's one thing that we learned on that day. When we got to the bottom of the hill, the one guy who had paid said, "I think was just being weak, because I wasn't with my brothers and my sisters. Next time, I won't be paying. Today you can just have your five dollars, but that's the last time." ¶ As far as our eyes can see, this is *our* treaty territory. Whomever it is, no matter what it is, no one can ever tell our people that we can't come up to see places, to be with the earth, and to pray.

What do you think the future holds for youth organizing and activism in the Lakota Nation?

There is so much exploitation up in the Black Hills. They are going to put logging roads right at the bottom of Harney Peak. There's going to come a time where we're going to have to put ourselves on the line with those bulldozers. And it's not going to be our elders anymore; it's going to be the young people. ☺

Fanorama + Society

When Richard E Bump (known to most simply as REB) started his zine *Fanorama* in 1992, it was a small fanzine, a simple cut-and-paste operation. Early issues were inspired by the burgeoning Homocore scene and fueled by REB's desire to create something that spoke to him and other queer zinesters. More than a decade later, some call him "the granddaddy of the queer zine scene," because REB is still going strong. He continues to crank out new issues of *Fanorama*, but he's also breaking new ground by connecting with his fellow zinesters behind bars.

Over the years, REB's single-zine operation has grown into the Fanorama Society Publishers—also known as the Fanorama Society Cabal—a publishing company for zines written and created by prison inmates. As more and more zines make their way out of prisons, REB does everything he can to ensure they get printed and placed in the hands of people who want to read them. The zines he distributes are one of the best resources to gain true insight into the realities of prison life. They also show what it takes to hold on to your creativity in an environment that makes it all but impossible to do so.

REB and I talked recently about his projects and issues that face prisoners today.

Interview by **Claire Sewell**

I'm curious how you keep in touch with the prisoners you publish. Neil (creator of *Weiner Society*) and Chadd (creator of *Left Back*) are people you stay very close to. How do you do it?

Well, Neil and Chadd are always on my mind. Neil is dealing with Hepatitis-C and other serious health concerns while behind bars. Death by medical indifference is *not* an option. Chadd's been in the

hole because his administration has determined that his zine and his politics make him a "security risk." Those two boys are my constant companions, even though vast miles, razor wire, and concrete walls separate us. Chadd and I recently had our first face-to-face meeting in a prison visiting room in Ohio. Because he's so "dangerous," the visit was through bulletproof glass and he was in cuffs and shackles. Still, we were not deterred; we had a great visit anyway. Like the many times I've visited Neil, our hearts, minds, and souls are connected in spite of the obstacles stacked against us.

Have you run into any ignorance within the zine community in doing your work?

I was asked to facilitate a workshop on how to publish and distribute prisoner-created zines and ways to send zines to prisoners at the 2004 Philly Zine Fest, an organizer asked me if I was going to address "safety issues." I assumed she meant the risk that prisoners take by creating a zine from the gulag. Neil, Cedric, and Chadd have all experienced censure from their administrators when it was discovered they were doing zines; they have had all of their zines, personal letters, photos, and manuscripts confiscated; they had magazine subscriptions denied and personal mail scrutinized, even rejected. Other prisoners are routinely sent to the hole for receiving Anarchist zines. Those are real "security issues." But that's not what she meant. ¶ She wanted me to talk about the risks that people in the free world face when they send their zines to prisoners, especially if they use their home address instead of a PO box. That "safety concern" is not exclusive to people who

send zines to prisoners! How can someone stalk you from behind bars? People take risks and chances every day. How many people at the zine fair shared information with total strangers? How many people hook up online? How many people meet in a coffee shop or at a political rally?" ¶ After doing my zine for over 12 years, after publishing and distributing countless inmate-produced publications, after corresponding with literally *hundreds* of prisoners, the only folks that have made me feel "unsafe" were folks in the free world. It always angers and saddens me when supposedly radical people buy into the whole myth that prisons keep people in the free world safe from dangerous sociopaths. Sure, there are child rapists and serial murderers behind bars, but they constitute a small minority of the two million folks behind bars in America's prison industrial complex. ¶ So I spoke of these "safety issues" because I wasn't sure they would allow me to do the workshop if I refused, but I learned an important lesson: We still have a long way to go. Prisoner-created zines are a crucial way to dispelling the myths. When you shed the blinding light of truth on a subject, the myths, lies, and fear dissipate back into the shadows.

What are your thoughts on these "faith-based initiatives" that have become popular as a means of reintegrating prisoners into society after they are released?

Oh god! When Bush said, "everyone deserves a second chance" during his 2004 State of the Union address, he was referring to faith-based halfway houses. Often the only place a prisoner can parole to—especially if they have no family or their family abandons them while behind bars—



If everyone in America read just one issue of any of the zines we create, changes would begin to occur. People would be moved to take action.

are these Christian-run houses. It's like replacing one prison with another. Most of these "homes" permit no contact with the outside world. They have mandatory nightly "fellowship" and church attendance, restrictive dress codes, no swearing, no unauthorized music. On top of that, the residents are required to work raising money for Christian charities where they earn a very meager wage. It's basically slave labor. I think they're little more than glorified brainwashing centers funded by the religious right. Still, for many people it's the only option; as horrible as it is, it's better than prison. ¶ People shouldn't have to embrace a state-sanctioned religious dogma as a condition of their release. But where else are they going to go? They are usually released with a small bag of possessions, a few bucks, no driver's license, no place of residence, and no social security card. Try to find a job or a place to live without those credentials! And the Democrats haven't provided an alternative; neither party gives a fuck about the plight of prisoners—maybe that's because convicted felons can't vote. The sad fact is that the vast majority of them will rejoin society with no skills and no support systems. There's very little hope for them unless they have allies on the outside. A huge number of them will be released with HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis that they contracted while imprisoned. Many will still have addiction problems. So even after their release, the future is pretty bleak for most prisoners. ¶ My dream is to open my home to my collaborators as they are released one by one. The folks in the Cabal won't be recidivists when they get out because they won't be alone. They'll have their families and their fans and they'll

have me and we'll all have each other. I know it sounds hokey, but wait and see when we all show up en masse at the 2012 Philly Zine Fair! Talk about safety issues!

I wonder how can we push the voices of prisoners to the foreground of this discussion? There's so much discussion about them, but very little discussion with them on the topic of prison reform. Do you think it's possible to change that?

I've come to realize that I know less and less about "what's best" for prisoners. I mean, who am I? I'm just a guy who's never been inside a prison except to visit someone. I always knew I could leave. So if the only way someone can parole out is through Christian-based halfway houses, so be it. It's their choice to make, although I strongly believe they should have more choices. Let the prisoners decide what they need, what sort of assistance they need, etc. Talk to their loved ones and families. They're the ones who know. We basically throw prisoners to the sharks when they get out. Obviously, there are no easy answers. But I think even fucked up Christian halfway houses are an alternative that even hardcore atheist punks would take it if gets them out of the cage. ¶ What's the best way for prisoners to use their voices? Support and promote DIY prisoner-created zines. If everyone in America read just one issue of any of the zines we create, changes would begin to occur. People would be moved to take action.

I've heard you talking about a new prisoner-run zine library. What's the story with that?

A prisoner named John Smallwood wrote to me recently describing the free zine library he's creating in his joint in Indiana. Since many prisoners can't even scrape up the postage to mail and request zines that

are free to prisoners, and since John realizes it can get very expensive for a small DIY zinester to send free zines to prisoners, he came up with this great solution. If zinesters send John one free copy of their zine for his library, then they won't have to mail out duplicate copies to the same institution and prisoners won't have to make the choice between a stamp and an aspirin. It's a great solution to a growing need to provide alternative media to inmates.

So how can people who are interested in prison activism mobilize to support these causes?

You know, I don't know, but I think the first step in creating any type of change is knowledge. Blissful ignorance allows things to go unchallenged. The horrors that were occurring at Abu Ghraib didn't end until someone was brave enough to step forward and the photos were released. It's the same thing with American prisons. A wall of silence is deliberately built around them that is every bit as thick as the concrete walls. So, read a zine created by a prisoner. Join a local chapter of Books Through Bars. Go online and search out prison pen pal sites. Volunteer to teach or tutor at a prison. Make your zines available to prisoners. We can't demolish the system over night. But we can vote for politicians who make prison reform part of their agenda, and we can vow to never forget our brothers and sisters behind bars. Over time, a thousand tiny DIY actions could dismantle the prison industrial complex one brick at a time. In spite of the odds stacked against us, I remain hopeful. Any time an institution gets too big and powerful, it eventually collapses under its own weight. ©

By many accounts, Die Kreuzen's self-titled debut is a bona fide hardcore classic. When released by Touch & Go in 1984, it upped the ante for a scene that had begun to settle into complacency. It was faster, crazier, and meaner than anything that had come before it—and most things that have followed it. With the inhuman screams of vocalist Dan Kubinski and the amazingly tight musicianship displayed by all the players, the album pushed hardcore to its very limits. It was a genre-defining record—one that truly illustrated what hardcore was capable of doing. More so than many of their contemporaries, Die Kreuzen crafted a sound that captured feelings of rage, alienation, and confusion in ways that other hardcore bands could only hint at. While other groups paid lip service to their anger and disgust, Die Kreuzen played like their very lives depended on their songs. They made you believe.

Even today, it is hard to pin down exactly what made that first album so special, but something about it rang incredibly true to many who listened to it. Steve Albini, at the time, referred to it as "the definitive American punk record." In a world of "faster, louder" carbon copies, this record seemed like something more. It seemed authentic.

Yet the boundaries of hardcore punk—boundaries that they had helped to expand—soon proved too confining for Die Kreuzen. Unlike many of their peers, the band was not content to repeat the same record over and over again. For their second album, 1986's *October File*, Die Kreuzen began to draw from a completely different set of sources such as classic rock, 1960s pop, heavy metal, and more avant-garde strains of music. This commitment to experimentation continued throughout Die Kreuzen's history, making it incredibly difficult to label the band as standard bearers of any certain scene or style of music. That was fine with Die Kreuzen. To them, the only "rule" of punk rock was to do what you wanted when you wanted to do it, regardless of what anyone else thought. As underground music became more specialized and fragmented throughout the 1980s, Die Kreuzen stayed committed to open-mindedness, a fact that, while separating them from many of their peers, also left them without a well-defined place in the world of punk. Not knowing how to classify them, many simply didn't take the time to give their records a fair listen. Such a development means the band was underrated throughout their career and overlooked since their demise in 1992. In many ways, this became Die Kreuzen's unfortunate legacy.

I recently sat down and talked about this legacy with vocalist Dan Kubinski and bassist Keith Brammer, who, along with guitarist Brian Egeness and drummer Erik Tunison, made up Die Kreuzen. Their thoughts not only provide a fascinating look at the history of the band itself, but also offer a glimpse of the early history of punk rock in the United States.

Interview by **Michael Carriere**

What was your first exposure to punk rock?

Dan: I picked up an issue of *Creem Magazine* that had a picture of Johnny Rotten on the cover. They had kind of airbrushed him a little bit to make him look dirty, and I just couldn't take my eyes off of this thing; it was so different and so strange and almost threatening. A couple weeks later I walked into a department store, Osco or something, and they had albums and eight-tracks for sale in the back. Being this punk kid from Rockford, I stole *Never Mind the Bollocks* along with Pink Floyd's *Animals*, and maybe the first or second Heart album. I saw that bright pink and green Sex Pistols eight-track, and I was like "cool." I took it home and put it on and was like "Wow, this is *wild*, man, this is cool, I like this." From there, I kept finding magazines with Sex Pistols stuff and got into the Ramones from there, then the Clash and the Damned, and it just kind of exploded from there. But I blame *Creem Magazine* the most.

Keith: Early on in the whole punk rock thing, I was kind of absorbing everything that I could. I was lucky enough to have *Hit Parader* and *Rock Scene*, which was an interesting magazine based in New York. It was mainly photos of bands like the Ramones, the New York Dolls, and the Heartbreakers. That was in '75 or '76. I was intrigued by this scene before I ever heard the records. I still loved the bands that I was listening to, but this sounded like something really exciting. It *seemed* exciting, and—once I heard it—it was like, "This is exciting."

When the line-up for Die Kreuzen came together, what was influencing the direction you were heading in?

Dan: There were definitely things we were all hearing, but we were all listening to very different things as well. Keith was more into British stuff, Brian and I were

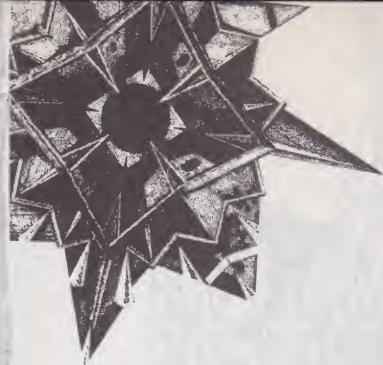
kind of focused on what was happening out West, like the Germs, the Circle Jerks, Black Flag, all the early recordings from those bands. Erik was kind of this freak—he kept trying to get us to listen to Vandergraff Generator, and Syd Barrett records, and some other very different stuff. But it all kind of came together to make this sound.

One of the most distinctive elements of Die Kreuzen's sound was the vocals. What were the influences behind your singing style?

Dan: That was really how I wanted to do it when I was a kid. I had been very attracted to Steven Tyler of Aerosmith's ability to just let that thing out, you know. When I heard Johnny Rotten do his growling thing, I was like "Wow, that's even *more* extreme, you know? That's really cool. I'd like to do something like that." And then I heard the Germs and Darby Crash do his thing, and I'm like, "Oh, god, how am I going to top *this*?" But that was what I really liked. I wanted to be like that but even harder, more intense.

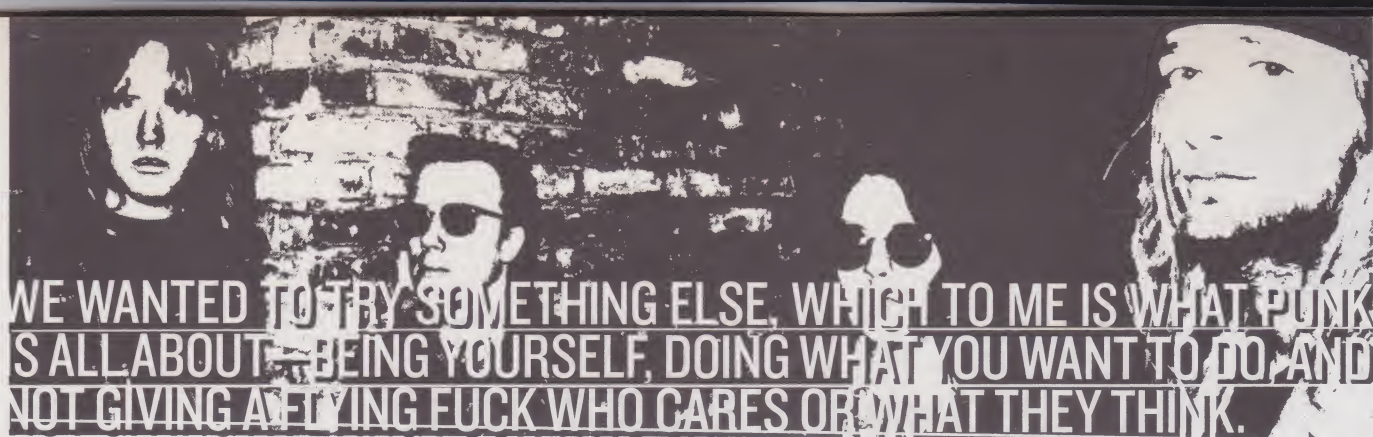
In terms of your discography, a lot of people tend to fixate on your first record. Do you feel that your other records may not get the attention they deserve?

Keith: I get so frustrated that people fixate on the first record and ignore everything else. To me, the first record is interesting as an artifact, but it's definitely not what I would call our best songwriting. More and more as the years went on, we were more interested in writing actual songs, rather than just doing things that would be immediately arresting. ¶ That's where I think people are missing the point, because now it's held up as this grand model. At the time I don't think it was. At the time it was just another record. It wasn't any more popular than any of the other 4,000 records out there that were vaguely similar. Naturally, I'll say we played it very well, and it was radical in that we went for broke, pushed it as far as we can possibly push it, played it as fast as we can play it. At the time we were writing that, the first Circle Jerks record was the fastest thing we had ever heard. That's what we were aspiring to do, only it ended up being far faster than that [laughs]. But at the time I don't think it was a model



d i e kreuzen





of anything. When we progressed, to me it was a natural progression. We weren't going to do the same thing for our entire career.

What was the response to your definite steps away from the hardcore punk of the first LP?

Dan: A lot of people were very upset, including *Maximumrocknroll*, who had written something like, "This fucking rules" 12 times for the first album. For *October File* they wrote "This fucking sucks. We've been fooled by these guys." We were kind of hurt by that, because we really liked Tim Yohannon and gang and felt like we were friends. We weren't screaming at the top of our lungs anymore or playing as fast as humanly possible, because we had *done* that. We wanted to try something else, which to me is what punk is all about—being yourself, doing what you want to do, and not giving a flying fuck who cares or what they think.

What about the progression from *October File* to *Century Days* in 1988, your third album? Did you feel like you still had a place in the punk scene, or was that not important to you?

Dan: We did feel that we were kind of on the outs with punk, because punk was staying so stagnant. It just seemed like, *man, you guys are just rehashing and regurgitating the same thing over and over*. Take that guitar and twist it. Take those notes and move them. Play something slow instead of just trying to pound it out continually. There were lots of different things happening musically for us in our tour van. We had all become really sick of the punk-rock tapes we were getting at every gig. Somebody gave me a Hasil Adkins tape along the way, and I really loved that thing. Keith was bringing in all kinds of different stuff, from big band to Nancy Sinatra to weird Monkees stuff [laughs]—if you go listen to some

Monkees records, you'll hear some really weird, off-the-wall, trippy kind of stuff. All of that started to play into our sound, listening to that stuff all day every day in the van. And then we started meeting other people like Sonic Youth, who were sort of punk rockers, but were off the beaten track. We were taking in all of these different things and meeting new people and hearing new and interesting things, and just wanting to be that way ourselves.

Keith: The idea of that was not important. The idea of being considered one thing or another was definitely not important to us. We were a rock band, but we didn't want to be considered *one type* of rock band. In particular, the idea of being considered a hardcore band was particularly abhorrent to us. Because by that time, hardcore had moved into an area which was a whole new set of rules. The original punk rock scene was more of a bohemian scene where you had people from other arts—painting, theater, others—and it was more of an art scene, like the Beats. It went from that into being this really strict set of rules that you had to follow, otherwise you weren't part of this anymore—you were an "art fag," or you were this or you were that. We hated that.

In 1991, you recorded your fourth and final album, *Cement*, with producer Butch Vig. Butch went on to become a major player in the grunge scene, and there are definite stylistic similarities between Die Kreuzen and many of the bands associated with that scene. Do you think Die Kreuzen served as an influence to any of these bands?

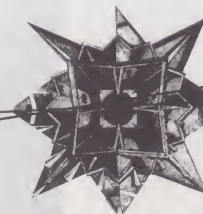
Dan: I don't think we really influenced anything, but we were around those circles, so maybe a few of those people had heard us. Butch was doing all kinds of exciting things, but I think there were a lot

of bands that influenced grunge. Though I was really kind of flipped out to see that thing in Kurt Cobain's notebook where he was going to ask Buzz from the Melvins if he had heard the new Die Kreuzen record. It's kind of weird to think that maybe a younger Kurt Cobain had a cassette copy of *October File* in his Walkman.

In the years since Die Kreuzen, what ideals have you held onto throughout?

Dan: DIY, man: Do It Yourself. If you want to do it, do it. Nobody's going to do it for you. That was what got Die Kreuzen out in the very beginning. That's all I can say. If you really want to do something, and you really want to be in a band, and you want to travel and put out records, well then just do it. I still totally cling to that. For my latest band, Decapitado, I paid for the recording of our album. I paid for the pressing of the disc. I still do it all.

Keith: I think just doing what you want to do. It might sound like a cliché—and I'm sorry if it does—but it's important to always be more concerned with what sounds good to *you* than what sounds good to everyone else. You want to do stuff that people will appreciate, but you don't want to do stuff solely so people will appreciate it. I don't want to be like Ayn Rand here [laughs], saying "selfishness is a great thing," but it really is. You do things because it's something that you can be proud of later in life. You can listen to it later—five years, 10 years, 20 years later—and say "OK, I'm proud of that," rather than listening to it and saying "Why did I do that?" I think it's about just being an individual whether you're a musician, or you're an author, or an artist. I think any of us would tell you that. ☺





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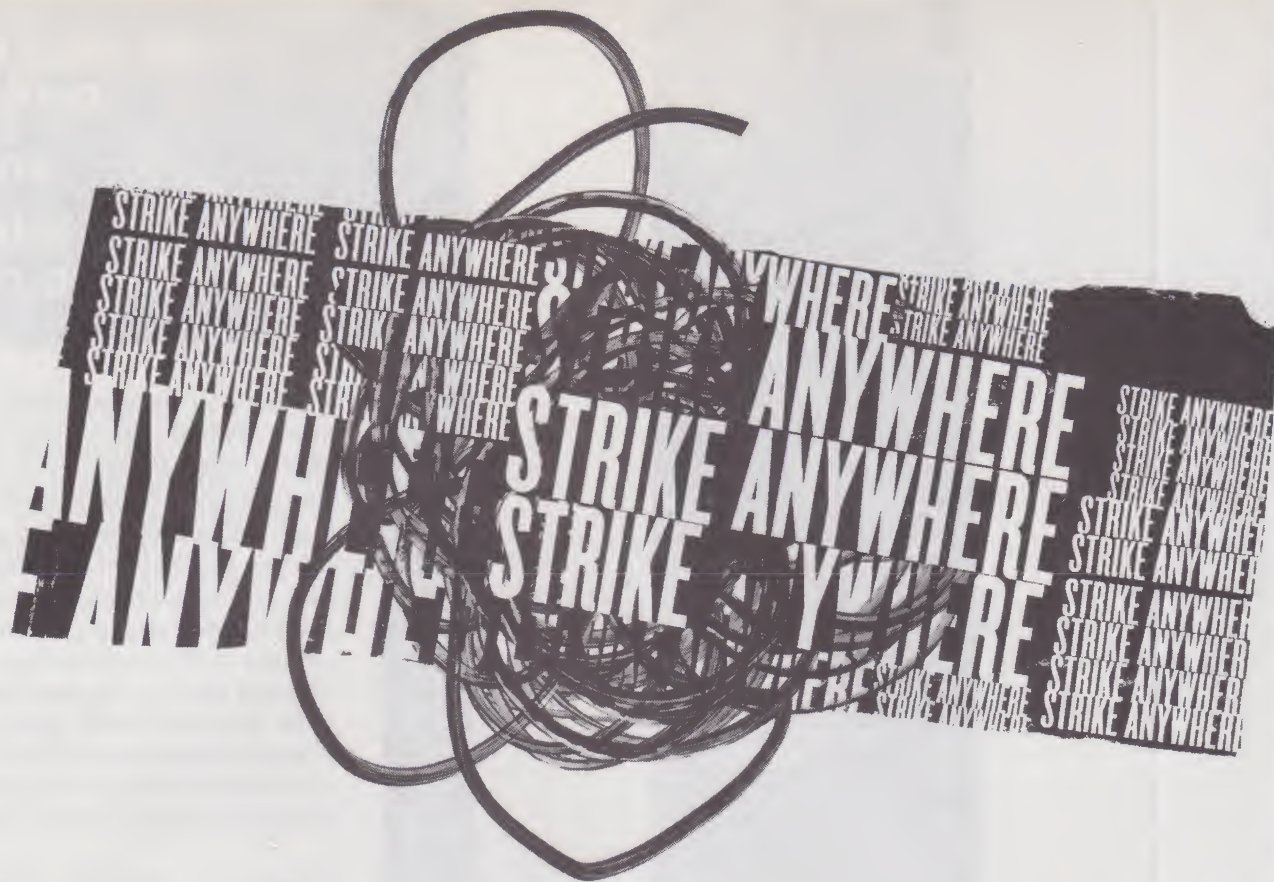
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What happened to the dissent that fueled the punk rock of the '80s? What happened to a band being a threat to a political system? What happened to informing listeners of blatant social maladies instead of teaching them how to cry over a broken heart? Sure, there are still political punk bands today, but their ambiguous rants of "fuck authority" or "you've got to fight" are as informative as a George W Bush press conference. Thankfully, same cannot be said for the music of Strike Anywhere.

Since 1999, Strike Anywhere has used their energetic, toe-tapping punk anthems to vent their frustration with the state of American politics, sexist advertising culture, substandard wages for the working class, and human rights violations. They back up their songs by joining forces with groups like AK Press, voter registration drives, and PETA to provide audiences with more information than they can fit into a three-minute song.

Punk Planet sat down with frontman Thomas Barnett during Strike Anywhere's last tour. While his dreadlocked appearance and

throat-shredding screams make him seem like someone you wouldn't bring home to mom, he is soft spoken, amiable, genuine, and—of course—informed. Barnett discussed the relationship between punk and politics, and how his views were shaped by his family history and his experiences working in factories. Barnett's background not only makes him an intelligent lyricist, but is also helping to make punk rock a threat once again.

Interview by **Matt Whelihan**

Do you think that people get into punk because they are into politics or do you think that people get into politics because they are into punk?

I think it's both. First of all, there are many different kinds of punk music. I think punk rock has more to do with choosing your own destiny and choosing to not be trapped by the dishonesty of commercialism and consumerism. It's about challenging the conformity, normative values, and apathy that plague what we call modern life. This so-

ciety buries most of us while other people get rich for stepping over us. Choosing punk means choosing to reject that way of life. ¶ At its best, punk is modern-day folk music—by that I mean *modernized* folk music. It's aggressive and distorted, but it's the sonic expression of what it feels like to be frustrated and alienated. During the Dust Bowl, folk bands were the alternative media. They were like, "Here's the real deal: You are being screwed over. Here's why you are angry and don't know who to fight." All of those issues were expressed by people like Woodie Guthrie using acoustic guitars But I think punk is more based in urban rebellion. Punk comes out of the idea that our culture has been taken away from us, so we have to create something new. When you look at it that way, it fits into a long tradition of political folk music.

So you're saying that by choosing punk, you are not fulfilling the demands of mainstream culture.

Right. You are not prostituting your talent in order to make money. You are tak-



ing a leap outside of the capitalist system—outside of dedicating your entire life to your career—in order to do something that comes from the heart.

You were on the Rock Against Bush tour leading up to the election. What was that experience like?

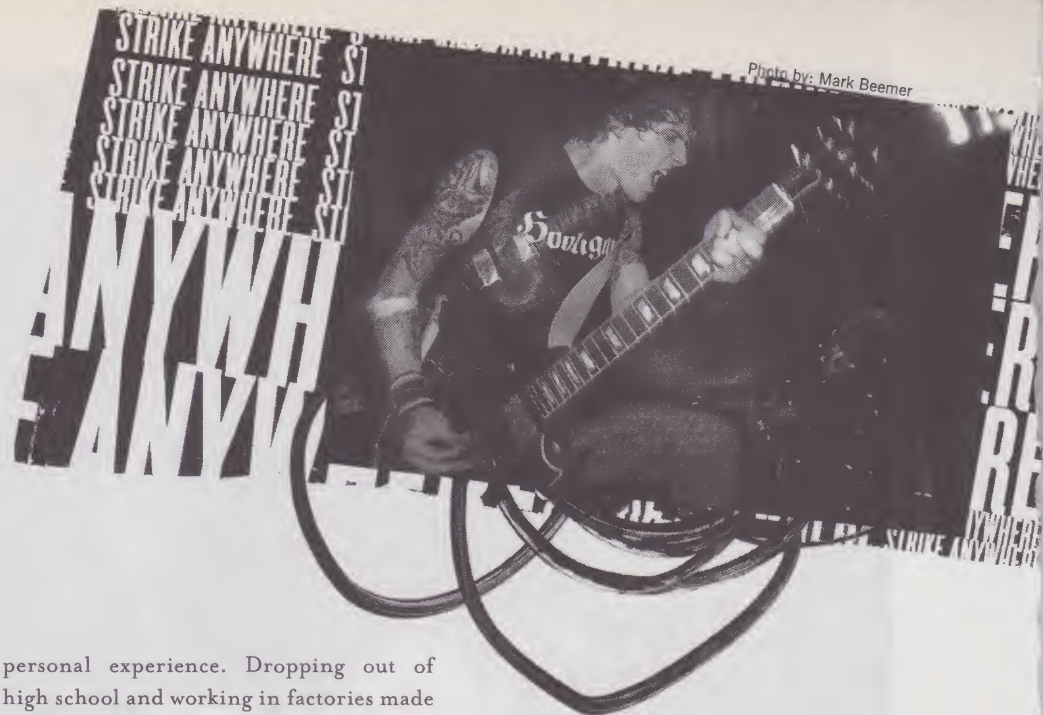
It was one of the most contentious tours we've ever done. People were enraged when they saw the wrapper around Anti-Flag's bus. It showed five different bullet points that stated how badly Bush has fucked things up, like the rising costs of health insurance and college tuition. People were reading that and they were getting mad at Anti-Flag. There was a fight between Midtown's roadies and these frat boys in Columbus, Ohio. There were like two Midtown roadies fighting eight frat boys; some of the frat boys were hospitalized while Midtown got away safe. The people who were fighting with us and throwing eggs at us when we were on the tour were a weird mix of working class folks and college frat boys from universities. George W Bush doesn't give a shit about them. It's as if they just want to be on the winning team. They want to buy into this American Dream and I guess they feel like Bush embodies that idea somehow.

Is it frustrating if kids are coming to shows and don't really care about your lyrics or don't gain anything from your message? If kids are just there because it is a punk show or they like your music, do you still appreciate that they come out and support you?

Yeah, I definitely appreciate it, because I think that is the way things start. But I think it is impossible for people not to care about the lyrics after a while. Maybe they're drawn in by the intensity of the music; maybe they're outcasts who like getting together with other people who don't fit in—that is a big part of the punk experience. But I think when people come to shows they are getting more out of it than the style of the music, otherwise they wouldn't keep coming back.

Your lyrics cover themes such as police brutality and better wages for working people. Does your interest in these topics come out of personal experiences?

Most of the songs I write have come from



personal experience. Dropping out of high school and working in factories made me realize that the American dream is a myth that encourages people to invest in their egos and their selfishness, and leads them down a self-destructive path. It's like: here's my intellect, here's my talent, here are the resources I was born with, and now I'm just going to have to take this and run over everybody else. That is the American dream; that is the way people are behaving. I just always thought there was something bigger out there.

How old were you when you dropped out of school?

I was 17. It was my junior year.

Why did you decide to drop out?

It was an interesting environment. It was the late '80s, and I guess the movie *Pretty in Pink* kind of describes the scenario. There were two or three neighborhoods that were lower-middle class, and all the subculture kids—whether they were heavy metal kids, skinheads, skateboarders, or punk rockers—all came from those neighborhoods. Everybody else—the other 75 percent of the students—were athletes, jocks, or hyper-rich kids with cocaine problems. The principal was in the pockets of the wealthier families, and it turned out that he had shifted a lot of money from the academics program into the athletics department, so all my honors teachers were bummed out—quitting, trying to

strike, and getting fired. They weren't allowed to do field trips anymore. The school wasn't giving any extra funding for anything. There was this climate of intolerance. It would be ridiculous to think of this happening now, but it was the late '80s, and it was happening in many high schools across the country. There was a lot of messed up crap happening—a lot of kids were getting beaten up or fucked with—and no one was being held accountable. The other kids basically ran the school. ¶ At pep rallies, as part of their routine, the wrestling team and the football team started to make fun of the punk-rock kids, the goth kids, the skateboarders, anyone who was into hip-hop. We all thought it was really offensive, so we held our own demonstration and a riot broke out. We were escorted out and thrown into in-school suspension. This kind of thing happened twice and after the second time my friends and I were banned from all school activities. ¶ All those things combined made me realize that high school was a complete waste of my time. I dropped out, started working full time, and took night classes at Virginia Commonwealth University. I worked at a printing press; I was the only young man on the job and the only Caucasian on my entire shift. I worked nights—three 12-

"I think when people come to shows they are getting more out of it than the style of the music, otherwise they wouldn't keep coming back."

hour shifts a week. It started at 8 p.m. and ended at 8 a.m. When the machines would break down, people would just kind of relax and talk to each other. I learned a lot when that happened. Then when they were back up it was merciless, relentless, repetitive work. I had a bunch of different factory jobs like that. ¶ I had this amazing job for Pepsi once. On a whole run of Pepsi cans the aluminum had been spun a micrometer too thin, so in grocery stores all over the world—mostly the Pacific, East Asian, and Californian markets—one out of 24 cans in a case of Pepsis would explode. They had to recall like a billion cases of Pepsi. They put them in this giant warehouse that looked as if it inspired the last scene of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. Our job was to read the numbers on the top of all the cans and throw away the ones that were a part of the bad batch. It was *ridiculously* monotonous, but you could work 18 hours a day; that was a good way to save money. I met a lot of disgruntled and messed up crystal meth addicts from the white-trash suburbs of Olympia, Washington while I was working there. ¶ Working in Richmond was different. In Richmond I experienced a lot more solidarity among workers—even across racial lines—and I began to understand the investment that people have in these jobs. They took it seriously; they took the training seriously, and they took their positions seriously. But upper management took the workers for granted. I saw a lot of heartbreak when that happened; I knew a lot of 40-year-old men with families—who had no pension and no job security—watch their health insurance plans get trimmed again and again and finally bought out. It was insane. Right now I'm working in the organic produce world at a farmer's market in Vermont.

That sounds better than factory work.

Yeah, there was a ball-bearing plant on the south side of Richmond where they had me operating a jackhammer, trying to fix the plumbing in the middle of winter. All the grass on the banks of the river near the factory was an unnatural blue-green color, and the ground was warm even in the dead of winter. We thought it was snowing the whole week. I thought, "Gosh it's just snowing in this one area in south Richmond." But we found out it wasn't actually snow that was falling. The flakes were plastic shavings that erupted into the air from the inside of the factory. So there have been a lot of strange moments where I thought I was being poisoned by something industrial [laughs]. I was in really surreal environments.

Yeah, blue-green grass and plastic snow.

Another thing is that my grandfather was a sergeant in the Army Corp of Engineers in 1940. In '44, Union Carbine was contracted by the US government for a building project. He was on that job for about eight months and then he was called for another job. My father was born with a lot of birth defects and so was I. It turns out that my grandfather had been building on the bombs they dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. That's why my grandfather, like thousands of other men who were contracted to work on the Manhattan Project, got really sick. The reports on the working conditions are just coming out now. They talk about men wiping off spots of glowing dust from their clothes, eating their lunches on top of boxcars that were full of plutonium. I know that is what happened to my grandfather. He died of cancer at a young age, and my dad and I were both born with congenital birth defects, so it's weird to finally see those reports come out in print about Union Carbine. There is so much research that has been done since then, so now they have to claim some re-

sponsibility for it.

So they accepted responsibility, but are they doing anything, like reparations?

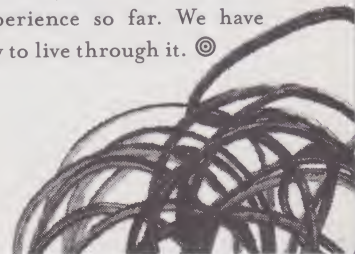
No, not at all. Union Carbine will acknowledge certain facts, but they won't claim any responsibility for reparations. That's another thing that awoke my political consciousness: Seeing how people, like my grandfather, were viewed as expendable. They don't even count as collateral damage. A lot of people perished slowly in order to build this bomb and they don't even get counted. It helped me figure out how the world works

So was it your school experience, your factory experience, or the experience of your grandfather that made you socially conscious and politically active?

The emotional need probably came from understanding my family's experience. It made me feel like an outcast, like I was disfigured and strange. I had to make my own way and understand the world on my own terms. For me, punk rock was the perfect outlet for what I was feeling. I think that's what punk is for anyone who feels like an outcast because their not running around trying to buy into all that bullshit so that they can fit in.

What were the goals you guys had when you started? Where do you stand today?

Everything we've done was a goal. The first time we played DC was a major achievement; the first time we went on a tour was awesome. It's not like building wealth or trying to have a corporation or anything like that, it's your *life*. You can look to the horizon, but mostly you have to make sure that you are doing something that is important to you and that you're allowing yourself and the people around you to be as free as possible. ¶ It's really incredible to still be doing this with all of the different moments of self-destruction and implosion that punk has been through. I think it's a testament to punk as a movement: It has been through so many moments when people were ready to give up on it, and it's changed so much over the years. So we are just one of many bands who has built this fearless and furious pursuit of honesty in music. It's been an amazing experience so far. We have been really lucky to live through it. ©



Like grabbing an electric eel by the tail, Dan Sartain is a true shock: his music is stripped-down, traditional rock 'n' roll in the style of Buddy Holly, though a little more spooky and a little more strange. His songs feature booming choruses and catchy lyrics, but there's nothing derivative or predictable in his rhymes. Why? Well it helps that Dan Sartain sings a lot about snakes, though not exclusively. There are three amazing songs about cobras and one about leeches appearing on his record *Dan Sartain Vs. Los Serpientes*, from Swami Records.

While the snakes help, what makes this solo performer truly so interesting is his ability to hypnotize an entire, live audience with only his guitar and his voice. It is the surprise of seeing someone armed with only his earnestness, charismatic stage presence, and single instrument that makes his performance so mesmerizing.

I spoke to Sartain after he returned to his native Alabama following a tour opening for the Hot Snakes.

Interview by **Joe Meno**

Photography by **Wes Frazer**

Watching you perform live is really disarming: one man with one instrument taking on a whole audience. Why play solo?

To tell you the truth, I can't really afford to pay for a band. I'm not making enough 'scratch to make it worth two other people's time. I was in bands with two or three other people but after a while, well, people moved on, but I wanted to keep the songs I wrote. But I also feel like a lot of bands now are so loud you can't hear them, if that makes sense. I can't tell what they're doing. I think soul and power is a *feeling*, not a volume.

What was the reaction been like opening for Hot Snakes?

It's been really good, man. I sold out of my shirts and CD's. I was scared a bit at first. I talked to Jon Reis from Hot Snakes and said, "Look, I'm gonna be doing a lot of these shows by myself. Is that gonna be any kind of problem?" because I know how loud they are. He was like, "Just do it. It'll

be all right." And it worked out better than being loud for loud's sake.

Were there any moments you were playing where you wished you had a band behind you?

Not so much on that tour, but it has happened in the past. But I keep on thinking about Cat Stevens—I don't like him at all—but he used to open up for Hendrix. I think about him doing that and he was *totally* effective.

Let's talk about the record, *Dan Sartain Vs. Los Serpientes*. Listening to it, it sounds like some of the songs are lifted straight from a demo tape.

Nah, they weren't demos, it was a record. I recorded a full-length and made 200 of them. I recorded it on a four track with some friends and it came with 3-D glasses. About a third of that same stuff is on the Swami record.

Why did you decide to keep the four-track stuff instead of re-recording the whole record with better production?

Well, that's what I wanted to do; when I got the call from Swami, I wanted to record in a big studio.

Get a choir in there, maybe?

Right. I'm *not* above thinking big. But those guys were like, "No, it's raw, it's good." I like the way old stuff sounds, but I don't like when people go out of their way to sound shitty. It's not just soul, it's not genuine, it's a trend. I mean I thought the original record I recorded sounded good. And then everyone was like, "Oh, it's lo-fi. I'm totally into lo-fi." I was like, "What is lo-fi? This sounds *good*. What are you talking about?" I recorded some of the stuff by myself, I recorded some with Jon in San Diego, and some with Gar Wood, from Beehive and the Barracudas. It's cut up into thirds.

What were the bands you drew from for inspiration as in writing and recording the album?

Woodie Guthrie, very much, I like him a lot. Leadbelly is really good. Alice Cooper. I've been into Alice Cooper since I've

been six years old. It was the first record I bought. If you listen to really old Alice Cooper, when it was him and a band in a garage, it is really old sounding. It wasn't rockabilly, but just old rock'n'roll. He knows where to draw the line, too—he's not Marilyn Manson who does interviews in full make-up and says weird shit just for the sake of saying it.

Do you ever feel worried that people might think what you're doing is derivative, because it's so closely based on music that has a long history to it?

A lot of these guys who have been doing the garage rock or rockabilly thing since like '98 seem like Civil War re-enactors. They're trying too hard to make sure everything's from the past: "My amp is from the past. My guitar is from the past. My chord is from the past." I'm not obsessed with it. Some of these kids are fascist about it. They're absolutely *fascist*. Fuck, when I'm on stage, I'll wear some nice shoes and some slacks or something, but when I'm not playing, I'm just kicking it in Reeboks. I'm not worried about my hair being perfect like a lot of these guys are. I guess there's a market for it. But I'd rather play to a crowd that isn't expecting you to act like the past and say "Daddy-O" all the time.

Let's talk about your love of snakes. You have a trilogy of songs on the record: "Walk Among the Cobras" part one, part two, and part three.

Those songs come from when me and my friend, John Hall, who plays drums with me a lot, used to live in Kansas City for a while. We were broke and playing on the street for money, busking in front of some café. This guy came out and was mad because we were playing, and said, "You couldn't walk among the cobras with that stuff."

He was mad you were playing in front of his restaurant?

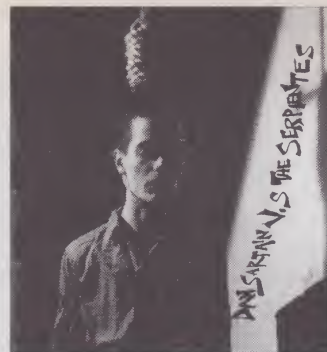
It wasn't even his restaurant, he was just eating there. I've never heard anybody say that before. Maybe it's a Kansas City thing.



DAN & SARTAIN



I'm not worried about my hair being perfect like a lot of these guys are. I guess there's a market for it. But I'd rather play to a crowd that isn't expecting you to act like the past and say "Daddy-O" all the time.



What the hell does that even mean?

I don't know. I think it means like you can't be among the big boys. I figure the cobra has a lot of power, like a king, and it could keep you down, like a metaphor for "the Man."

That's the way you interpret it in the song?

Yeah, you've got to learn how to be amongst them. Sometimes you have to learn to be a snake before you can beat them. In the second song, I say, "They strike as far as they can reach." Basically, a cobra can only stand so tall and that's as far as they can get to you, so the snake handlers know how far they can get and how far they can't. They can only get as close as you let them.

I've never seen a song with two sequels on one record like that.

A lot of soul guys will do that. The Isley Brothers had "The Pride" and they have a bunch of sequels to that, and James Brown has a lot of sequels, too.

Your record cover is one of the strangest I've ever seen—it's a black and white photo of you being hung.

James Dean took some cool pictures like that. It was a series: one he's dressed like a cowboy; the second one he's got his hat

off, smoking a cigarette, with a noose in his hand; the third one, he's just hanging from the noose. I wanted the photo of me to go on the inside of the CD and I sent it to Swami and there were like, "No, this is the cover." But the thing is, I actually had to do it, I actually had to hang myself. I hung myself like 18 seconds or something. In the picture, my neck is stretched out really far. I was off the ground, actually hanging and choking.

That's pretty fucking spooky. Between the hanging and the snakes, the record has a kind of ghostly quality to it. Have you ever seen a ghost?

Nah, I really don't believe in stuff like that. But to tell you the truth. I would like to. I tried to.

You tried to?

There's a place called Sloss Furnace down here in Birmingham, which is basically why the town was built at all. It was a big steel plant built in the 1880s and it was basically a slavedrivers' place. You worked and lived on the grounds of the plant and they had a store there and you got paid in Sloss Furnace money. You went and got your groceries with this fake money. A lot of people died there. It was pretty unfortunate. Now

it's a landmark and they have a haunted house there for Halloween. Well, I worked there for three or four years and I started feeling bad because I felt it was kind of blasphemous after a while. Everyone who worked there said there were ghosts, and I'd go break off and go into the places you weren't supposed to go. I'd look for stuff and then I would close my eyes and go, "Ooooooooooom," like a ghost, but they never came around. I want to believe it, but in my heart I don't really think it's true. I know misfortune did happen at that place and I think it's kind of stupid to make a haunted house out of it. You couldn't make a haunted house on the site of the World Trade Center. Sloss Furnace was a tragedy and you shouldn't make light of it. They have teenagers dressed up as coal workers who jump out at you and it's like, "Oh man, come on that is *totally* distasteful."

Your whole album seems like it's influenced by ghosts and monsters and hidden evil.

I'm thinking more along the lines of real monsters. More like my boss at work or some girl that broke my heart. I'm not thinking about Freddy, but real guys who are trying to get you down. ©

Cobras: True or False with Dan Sartain

True or False: Cobras are the only snakes that make a nest for their eggs?

I wouldn't know. Do they give birth to live young? I'm gonna say true.

It's true! True or False: A baby cobra's venom is just as poisonous as an adult's?

I'm gonna have to say true on that one.

It is true! True or False: Cobras eat other snakes?

I don't think that's true. I think they eat birds, don't they?

It's actually true! They eat other snakes and sometimes other cobras.

Wow.

You have enough material for another cobra song now.

I'm gonna have to start doing prequels like George Lucas.

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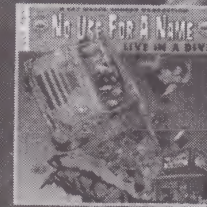
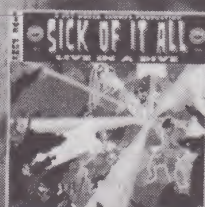
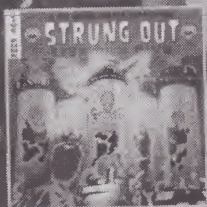
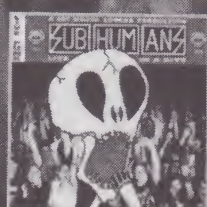
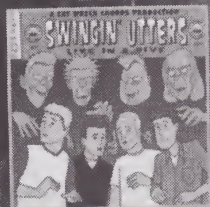
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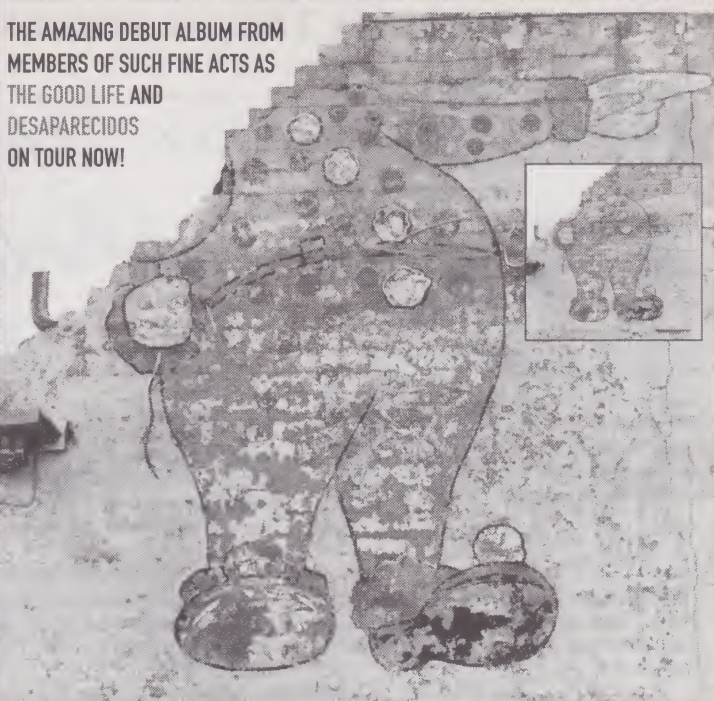
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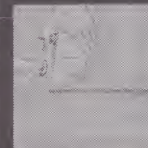
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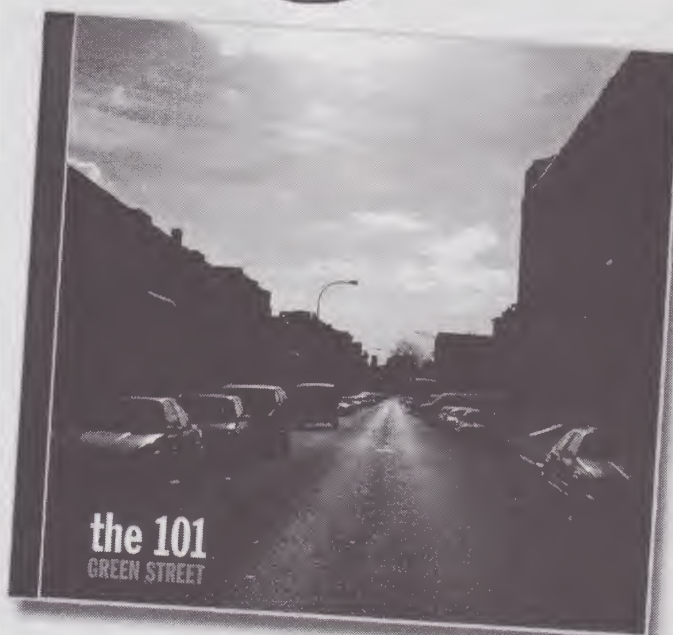
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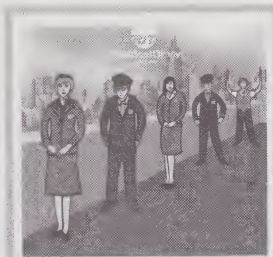
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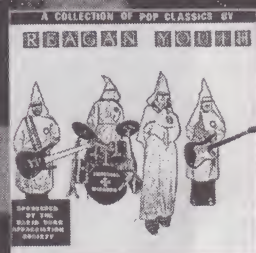
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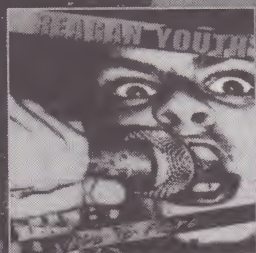


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YES DUMBFUCK, WE HAVE THAT!

What [in god's name] Do We Do Now?



As Bush begins another four years of his presidency, activists prepare for another four years on the streets. *Punk Planet* talks with four diverse organizers about their thoughts on the past and their plans for the future.

Introduction by **Anne Elizabeth Moore** | Illustrations by **Nick Butcher**

As this issue goes to press, activists in the US are mounting Inaugural Day protests in a last-ditch effort on behalf of a people that feel disenfranchised by democracy. One high-school student in Evanston, IL created a flyer announcing her school's walk-out (planned to coincide with the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance) demanding George W Bush explain the following:

- 1,357 US troop casualties
- An unknown number of Iraqi civilian casualties
- Torture, illegal detention, and racial profiling in the name of the US government overseas and at home
- Attempting to write discrimination into the constitution
- Invoking the name of god to justify irrational stubborn action to a country in which church and state are supposedly separate
- Making racism a key part of the US security strategy
- Giving the finger to international law
- Turning the largest surplus in US history into the largest deficit
- Provoking hatred and disgust towards the United States in the world at large
- Giving tax cuts to the rich, placing the war burden on the poor
- Creating forced patriotism by instilling national fear

When the What Do We Do Now section of *Punk Planet* was planned, we were still reeling from the November 2 election results, in which Bush was voted into office by an extremely narrow—and questionably achieved—margin. We were tired, we were shocked; we were in mourning.

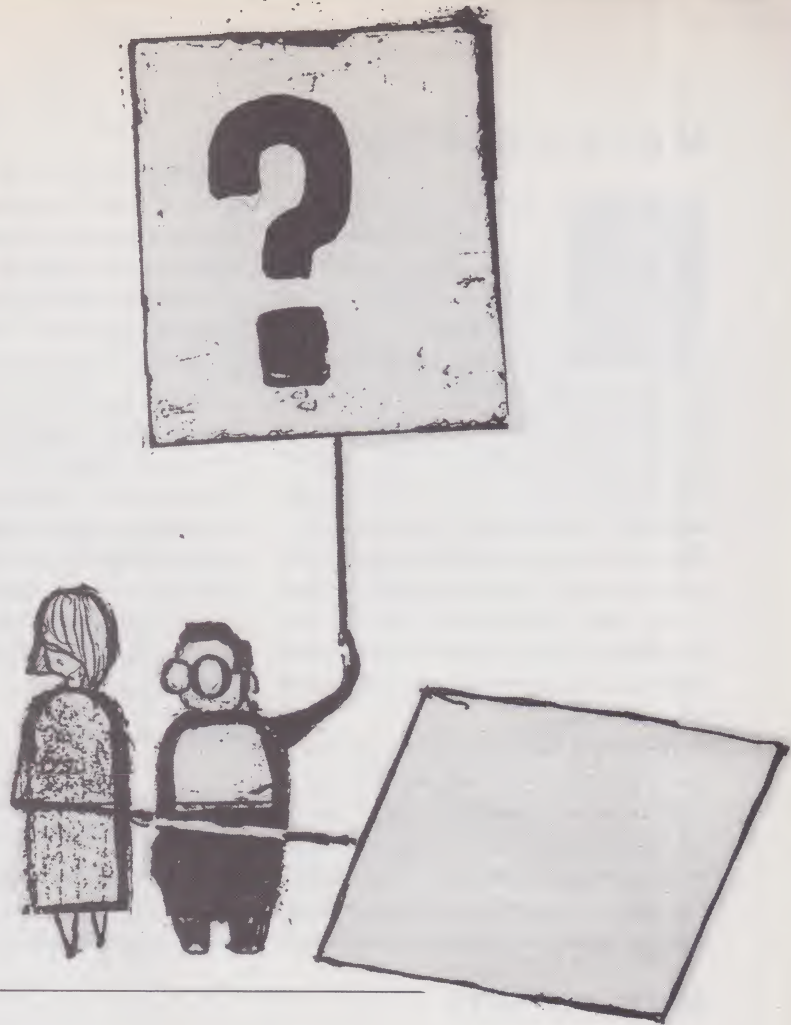
Yet a group of kids in Evanston wants some answers—and, hey! Come to think of it, we do too. The war in Iraq continues as despicably as ever; racism, sexism, and homophobia abound at home and abroad; poverty and unemployment are as rampant as the spending of our tax dollars; and now it seems we have an entrenched religious zealotry to contend with in politics, despite that our founding fathers very clearly banned it

from the realm of government. These are pressing concerns, and would have remained so even if every voter in Ohio had been granted the right to register their opinion in the last presidential election.

The political situation in this country is shocking, but it is our situation. The following interviews offer words of solace and sympathy—but most importantly: strategy. Sure, activists like William Etundi of the May First Technology Collective, Medea Benjamin of Code Pink, media theorist Robert McChesney, and Punkvoter's "Fat" Mike Burkett have every right to mourn, but instead, they choose to organize.

In response to the question What Do We Do Now?, these organizers have very clear, reasoned responses. Etundi wants to focus May First on local, day-to-day concerns while providing a technical support to the social justice movement. It's not about profits, he says, "it's about having a collective workplace that is truly functional for the people who work there, and ensuring that it can support them." Benjamin and Code Pink demand we reframe the terms of the national political debate and see the women's issues embedded in war and economic concerns, "so that we are not only a movement about women's reproductive rights." In support of such work as May First's and Code Pink's, McChesney urges us to reinvigorate serious political debate, reminding us how unfortunate it is that, "the only serious political criticism that survives in our culture comes from comedy."

OK. We won't mourn any longer; we will organize. But we'll have to do it a little differently this time, because we've got a minimum of four very difficult years ahead, and we've got to keep our strength up. So perhaps, when thinking about the newly elected leader of the free world and asking ourselves the question, What [in god's name] Do We Do Now?, it is important to remember the words of "Fat" Mike Burkett, who tells us we have to keep working, but we also have to "continue to party and have a good time." After all, what revolution would be worth undertaking that did not improve the quality of our lives? ☺



MIKE BURKETT



Prior to the last elections, the Punkvoter website and the Rock Against Bush fundraising compilations and tour were very clear in their mission to unite punk bands, labels, and fans together to combat one man: George W Bush. The man behind Punkvoter, “Fat” Mike Burkett (also of NOFX and the Fat Wreck Chords label), was the most high-profile activist in the punk community during this time. Burkett’s efforts recruited bands both tiny and huge—including giants like Green Day, The Donnas, Good Charlotte, and the Foo Fighters—in his campaign. Successfully registering over 100,000 young voters made victory seem, at the time, imminent.

Although the creation of a grassroots, youth-led coalition grounded in the independent music industry was itself a worthwhile goal, it’s always dangerous to build a coalition based on any single issue, and uniting on this particular one—now that George W Bush will be president for another four years—in hindsight seems a downright waste of time. But was it?

Punkvoter has the potential to be more than a force intended to defeat one man—who ultimately wasn’t beaten anyway. Punkvoter was formed to educate, register, and mobilize progressive voters. Check. It wanted to reactivate the disenfranchised youth movement. Check. Perhaps most importantly, Punkvoter promised constituents it would be run with the “same energy and spirit of all punk efforts.” It certainly was—and still is.

Following what many activists referred to as “the unpleasantness” of November 2, Burkett made a perfect candidate for a post-election interview. Long-time punk activist Mark Andersen of Positive Force DC caught up with Burkett just before Christmas, finding him in a good-humored but feisty mood, ready for the fight ahead.

Interview by **Mark Andersen**

Almost two months after the election, what are your autopsy results?

People come up to me all the time and say “How are you since the election? Are you OK?” The day after I was a little numb, but that was because we had a really good election

night party at my house. All the Punkvoter people were there, and we had a great time. We stayed up until 3:30 a.m. There was a little crying, and a lot of hugs ... it was very therapeutic. We all had worked really hard and we told each other how much we cared about each other and what a good effort we made. I am so relieved the election is over.

People sometimes ask, “You lost the election, do you feel like a big failure?” and I say no. No, I feel like we accomplished everything we set out to do, but we just didn’t win. We still got a few hundred thousand kids involved and our generation voted for Kerry more than any other age group.

It did seem really striking that young voters very much went against Bush.

Right, and we had something to do with that. We got so many kids out there, all these first-time voters. Once you are registered and actually vote, you are usually a lifetime voter after that.

What’s next for Punkvoter and Rock Against Bush?

MEDEA BENJAMIN



There I was, sandwiched between Arnold Schwarzenegger and Dick Cheney—not exactly the kind of sandwich you want to be in.” This is how Medea Benjamin

described her coordinates on the floor of the 2004 Republican National Convention when she unfurled a banner on behalf of activist organization Code Pink reading: “Be Pro-life: Stop the Killing in Iraq.” Security guards immediately whisked Benjamin away and treated the nonviolent activist to two-and-a-half hours of questioning as reprisal for her action. Not Benjamin’s first run-in with authorities, the seasoned activist simply rejoined fellow Code Pink members for more RNC protests after her release.

Benjamin is the co-founder of Code Pink, a grassroots organization that was launched in 2002 by women committed to ending the U.S. war in Iraq, as well as the founding director of the human rights organization Global Exchange. Code Pink takes on issues of peace and justice through “creative protest and non-violent direct action”

and dares “outraged women ... to be outrageous for peace.” Code Pink has protested against FOX News by organizing a “Shut-up-a-thon,” donned snouts with their “Hallibacon” mascot to highlight corporate war profiteering, and counter-protested during President Bush’s inauguration in actions like the “Black Gold and Boots Ball.”

Backed by informed spokespeople, Code Pink’s humorous pageantry has struck a resonant chord—the group boasts affiliates throughout the world. Strategizing and collaborating with Greens, progressive Democrats, and other grassroots activists, Code Pink crusades to raise awareness of issues from the environment to electoral reform, and to hold elected officials and corporations accountable for their policies and practices.

Interview by **Emily Udell**

Code Pink has over 80 active chapters worldwide. What has made Code Pink so successful?

I think Code Pink has been successful because we’re about action. We encourage people to get out and do something to show

their support for the policies, politicians or business practices that they believe in and to show their opposition to ones they are against. It’s done in a very creative way, oftentimes with a lot of humor. It seems to have resonated with a lot of women and men—not only in the United States, but in different parts of the world. Using pink as a unifying theme is almost silly, but it works better than we ever thought it would because if you’ve got 10 women in hot pink boas in a crowd of people, they stand out. If you’ve got five people in front of a military recruiting station dressed in pink gowns, it’s a media event: it’s not a failed action because only five people showed up.

What has the coverage of Code Pink been like in mainstream media?

Surprisingly positive. We were amazed at the Republican National Convention at the good press coverage we got in mainstream media, from television to the New York Times to commercial radio. For the inauguration of Bush we’ve

MIKE BURKETT

Actually, I haven’t made any plans to do another Rock Against Bush compilation right away because I don’t want to seem like I am profiting from the situation. Once we start getting close to another election, I will start fundraising again. We raised close to a million dollars with the comps. We spent most of it advertising, over half a million dollars in ads against Bush. I’d like to do that again, but not right this second. Right now, we’re trying to keep the fight going by putting news items on the website (www.punkvoter.com). I want it to be an educational site: where you get stories you are not going to see on the nightly news, a good place for kids to go to see what is going on.

There has been a lot of talk about “red” versus “blue” states and the coasts versus the center of the country. Yet, in my home state, Montana, a Democratic governor was elected, and in Colorado they got a Democratic Senator, so the results were a bit more mixed than we are led to believe. How could progressives gain more ground in areas of the country that often seem to be conceded to the Republicans?

Most Americans share the same ideals. It’s just that the Republicans are so much better at marketing their side. They call Democrats limousine-driving Democrats, but they are really the corporate-jet Republicans! I read an article called “How the Democrats got Betamax’d by the Republicans.” The Betamax was a better machine, but the VHS marketed better and got their tapes into the store faster and they beat out Betamax. It didn’t matter which machine was better. And that is what is happening to us. People in the Midwest consider themselves Republicans, but they all stand for Democratic values. You know, how do we fight that?

There’s a book called *What’s the Matter with Kansas: How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* by Tom Frank; it’s looking at how his home state, Kansas, which now is a Republican hotbed, had been transformed from a radical, cutting-edge state. Frank asks how Republicans made such inroads when their policies actually hurt a lot of the people there.

Most Americans share the same ideals. It’s just that the Republicans are so much better at marketing their side.

I heard a NASCAR racer who was stumping for George Bush and he goes, “Who do you want to vote for? John Kerry lives in a mansion in Massachusetts and George Bush lives on a farm.” [Laughs.] A farm?! If you have a 200-acre ranch, they call it a farm. If you live in a house in Massachusetts, they call it a mansion.

It is a challenge for punk rockers to counteract those tactics because we are seen as the epitome of this urban, counter-cultural experience. How can we fight them?

I don’t know. Now, the last post we put on Punkvoter.com is about how Fox News is getting on all the Clear Channel radio stations. They have a five-minute segment



received a lot of press that is also quite positive. I think we have come to be seen by the press as a group that does things that are visually interesting but also has depth to it. If we're talking about Iraq it's because someone from Code Pink has just come back from the region. If we're talking about electoral reform it's because we're intimately involved with the issues. If we're talking about the concentration of media and the need to have more diversity in media, it's because we've really studied our stuff.

From a progressive's eye view it appeared that the swelling of the tide against Bush was so enormous that it ensured a victory for John Kerry in the 2004 presidential election. Why weren't those grassroots efforts enough?

We had blinders on and we didn't see how much Bush supporters were organizing. For all the frenzy of activity we had going on, they had just a little bit more. That came from 30 years of setting up the infrastructure to do that, whereas ours was

pretty much an 11th-hour effort. The lesson there is not to leave the building of the infrastructure and the outreach to the last minute [and] to make it part of our everyday activities.

How is Code Pink reorganizing after Kerry's defeat?

Code Pink [is] not an electoral group. We don't belong to a political party. We got involved in the effort to hold Bush accountable because of our commitment to ending the occupation of Iraq. Now we are strategizing with groups of progressive Democrats, Greens, Independents and Anarchists about how we build a progressive movement in this country. For us it's about movement-building. Prior to September 11, many of us in Code Pink were involved in successful efforts to focus on the issue of corporate-dominated globalization and the need to stop the trend toward further privatization of the world's resources to the benefit of the already wealthy. It's important for us to go

We had blinders on and we didn't see how much Bush supporters were organizing.

back to those issues. ¶ I'm on my way to the World Social Forum in Brazil in January to connect with our colleagues in the global community who are trying to stop the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas, as well the free trade agreement for Central America. We're part of strategizing about how we're going to regain the momentum around the opposition to the World Trade Organization. We have a lot of important work to do on the economic front, but we've been hit with a double-whammy under the Bush administration because it's not just an administration that caters like never before to the corporate interest, it's also an administration that dragged us into this illegal, immoral war in Iraq.

every hour, telling millions of Americans what is going on in the world. Fox News!? I mean, CNN is bad enough, but Fox isn't even news. [laughs] And Clinton has a lot to do with it, because Clinton deregulated a lot of the radio. So you can blame him, not just Republicans. But now that they have a stranglehold on the media, it is really hard to fight because people are not getting the news.

Clinton was successful in a lot of ways but he was the sort of Democrat that comes out of the Democratic Leadership Council—the centrist folks who preach neoliberal economics.

Yeah, Clinton was the best Republican president we have had in a long time [laughs].

One of the things Tom Frank argues is that part of why the Democrats have done so poorly is that they are attempting to mimic Republicans. After all, the Republicans are always going to be better at being Republican.

That's what I am saying. You can't fight the battle the way they are fighting it. You

can't use their tactics. You'll lose. We have to be strong in our values.

So you think Democrats have to get back to a more economic populist message—talking about class, about the rich and the poor, bosses and the working class?

Yeah, we are the working-class party ... but there are no more jobs. Manufacturing jobs are gone; that's all she wrote. I kind of look at this country as going really, really far south and no one can stop it. But I thought Kerry had a better chance of stopping it than Bush. Then again, I like to tell people, look at all the silver linings that are going to come from George Bush. Our economy is going to go into the toilet in these four years. If Kerry had won, he would have been blamed for it and that would have been worse for liberals in this country than anything.

So, partly due to forces beyond anyone's complete control, and partly due to Bush's move rightward, it may create a favorable situation for a skilled, committed, and inspiring Democratic candidate in 2008?

Absolutely. There is no chance that this country is going to do well in the next four years. It's all falling apart. The US dollar is terrible right now. At least one economist—Paul Krugman—says it is all going to unravel. The stock market, the real estate market, everything's going to fail.

It seems that the Bush Administration has painted itself into a corner. Assuming that their rosy scenario for Iraq doesn't come to pass, the military is essentially extended as far as it can go without a draft.

And what if we have a real situation with a country and we don't have the troops? And they're probably not going to want to go there. Because Americans don't want to go to another war and have their kids die. So, now when we actually find ourselves in a bad situation, we're going to have to stay away from it.

Having lived through the Reagan years, I remember the Rock Against Reagan efforts—the tour in particular—and how Reagan was re-elected anyway. Even though we didn't win, I am struck

So we'll also be focusing on how to build a movement that is capable of forcing the Bush administration to set a timeline [for withdrawal from Iraq]. We say, "Bring the troops home now," but we know there are a lot of countervailing forces to that. We've got to build a strong enough movement so that the troops don't stay there for five to 10 years, but leave as quickly as possible.

In a recent conversation I had with Tom Frank, author of *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, Frank said that since he moved to Washington, DC, he's discovered a real hatred for the left among Democrats. How do activists get the people who control the Democratic Party's agenda to take the values and goals of progressives seriously, and to recognize the potential they have for mobilizing a large base of support?

I got disgusted with the Democratic Party years ago, and that's why I joined the Greens. I am not in the business of working from within the Democratic Party, but certainly I recognize the con-

I got disgusted with the Democratic Party years ago, and that's why I joined the Greens.

tempt that the mainstream leadership of the party has for the real progressives within it. I am excited to be working with people like the Democratic Progressives of America, who came out of the Kucinich campaign and some of them out of the Dean campaign. They are rolling up their sleeves and their pants and starting to wade in the murky waters of the Democratic Party with a strategy—akin to one the Republicans started using many years ago—of focusing on the weak links within the Democratic Party and to target certain Congressional people who are really Republicans in disguise and run progressive Democrats against them. I think we'll be seeing more of that in the coming years. ¶

For me, I'm concerned about building progressive leadership on the grassroots level. The Green Party and progressive Democrats need to get elected at the grassroots level. I think they'll be new strategies to push the Democratic Party to respond to its base rather than constantly moving to the center, but it will be very difficult. Mainstream Democrats are already talking about who they will run in 2008 and the more you hear them talk, the more you realize that they want somebody who can appeal to the red states, somebody who is extremely centrist, who won't promote women's reproductive rights, who won't promote the rights of gays and lesbians, who won't promote the more progressive issues. It's incumbent on progressives who are still in the Democratic Party to really raise hell and show that it was the progressive wing of the party that really went out and busted their butts to get Kerry elected. They were the ones knocking on doors, delivering campaign literature, doing

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by how much more powerful the Rock Against Bush stuff was this past year. The networks that have been developed over the course of this campaign could be very powerful if they were maintained or even better, improved, both on the level of the performers and at the grassroots.

That's our plan, to keep everything going. I went to Rock Against Reagan and it was great, but back then a punk rock band was lucky to sell 10,000 records.

[Laughs.] Yeah, and if you did, you were a really big band then!

That was all there was. Rock Against Reagan went across the country in a school bus—Reagan Youth stayed at my house! It wasn't going to make a big difference because there wasn't the Internet and there wasn't this huge punk-rock scene. Now a decent punk-rock band sells 200–300,000 records and the big ones sell millions. So there is a much bigger audience. ¶ When the election was coming, I just looked at myself and thought, "I have to do this. Someone has to step up." All I did was get the ball rolling. I used all my "friend" cards and

all my "aces in the hole," because I had them. It was a good opportunity for the punk community to unite, and it really did.

You had bands like Against Me! or The Unseen—folks that are very underground—as well as folks like Good Charlotte ... and it worked, it had an effect. I just read an article where Good Charlotte was talking about one of their new songs, "I Believe," being about the war in Iraq, taking an anti-war stance. They were talking Rock against Bush, as well as about the tragedy of AIDS in Africa ...

Those guys were on the Warped tour with NOFX and I sat them down and talked to them and explained why they should be involved with this. One day Benji [Madden] was about to go on *TRL* right before they were getting big and he said, "Dude, they are going to interview us about the war, what should I say?" And I gave him some pointers. It was awesome because those kids really tried to use that opportunity to get their message across. Luckily, I wasn't in a band that was considered a sell-out band, so bands like

Good Charlotte or Yellow Card had some respect for NOFX and they would listen to me. ¶ On New Year's Eve two years ago, it took me an hour and a half talking to the singer of Yellow Card, because he was a Republican [laughs]. But I spent an hour and a half, me and Chris from Foo Fighters about why he should be against the war. And we turned him! Since then he talks about anti-war stuff when they are playing.

One of the things you pointed out in the Rock Against Bush CD was the power of people talking to other people that they know. It is so important to reach out! We also have to set aside some of the internal politics of the punk scene, like "indie vs. major label" or "straight edge" vs. "drunk punk" or whatever and find the common cause.

That is exactly what I tried to do. I tried to get every part of the punk scene united. Of course, some of the real crusty bands want nothing to do with us. They don't want to be involved in any organization that is Democratic at all. They just want their anarchy or their Green Party. I love the



all the calling. If you don't energize your base, no matter how many of those swing voters you get, you're not going to win.

How do organizers for groups like Code Pink gain the support of people in rural areas or states that are Republican strongholds?

It depends on what issue we're talking about. If we're talking about issues of trade—who is it that is most hard-hit by corporate-dominated globalization? It tends to be poor people, a lot of people in red states. Look at Oklahoma. A lot of people say that George Bush didn't really win it, but it's a state that's been devastated by the demise of the manufacturing sector, the outsourcing of jobs. These are bread and butter issues that appeal to a lot of Americans in the red states. If you talking about the war in Iraq, something very curious is happening now—while George Bush says that the moment for accountability was November 2004, and because he was reelected he has a mandate to continue his policy

in Iraq, but the polls now show the highest rate of disapproval since the war in Iraq began, reaching 58 percent in the latest Washington Post/ABC poll. When you talk about reaching people in red states and in rural areas, it tends to be their sons and daughters who are being sent to fight this war in Iraq. By reaching out to people in the military, to returning veterans, to the families whose lives have been devastated by this war, we can continue to increase the numbers that oppose Bush's occupation in Iraq.

What kind of role do you envision the women's movement playing in the larger progressive movement in the future, and especially over the next four years?

We are, as Code Pink, also focusing on March 8 of this year, International Women's Day, when the United Nations will be doing its 10-year review of the Beijing Women's Conference, and taking a look at the status of women around the country. We think it's important to be part of that

global review of women's status. As part of the women's movement in the United States, it's important to reinvigorate the movement so that we are not only a movement that is about women's reproductive rights, but that we see that the waging of war is a women's issue, that the use of millions of dollars of our tax dollars for destructive purposes instead of life-affirming activity is a women's issue, that trade issues are women's issues, that media concentration is a women's issue. If we cannot reach women about the truth about what is happening in our society, we'll see what happened in the last election, where more women, especially married women, vote against their own interests.

Do the issues need to be reframed in order to help people understand the interconnections between the movements?

We frame the issues well. I don't think it's an issue of reframing them, [but] an issue of how to reach enough women. We're always blocked by the media.

Green Party, too, but we really have got to be pragmatic here.

It was there for anybody to join in or not join in. It is kind of ironic, though . . .

. . . I know what you are going to say, that all the bands that would be the most anti-government are the ones that don't want to unite with other bands.

To me, that seems like one of the great problems on the left, even within the Democratic Party, there are all these little factions and we are not really standing together. To me, it was inspiring that Punkvoter and Rock Against Bush did bring together some very diverse folks. We really need to build on that. We have to get the punks sitting next to the low-income people sitting next to the homeless advocates next to the millionaire liberals and the working class people.

When you look at it, all the densely populated cities voted Democrat. It just goes to show that when you live around other people you build tolerance, start to understand different lifestyles. You say, "Oh, those people aren't so bad,

When the election was coming, I just looked at myself and thought, "I have to do this. Someone has to step up."

we have to live in this city together, we should take care of each other and respect each other." And then people who live on farms in the middle of nowhere, they don't see their neighbors, they don't know their neighbors. They don't see other kinds of people and they just care about themselves and their family. They are the ones who are the most scared . . .

I understand what you are saying but what you just described is where I am from. I grew up 15 miles from the nearest town or paved road! It is true that I kind of fled, and that punk rock was part of what gave me a vision beyond the world of my county. Still, people like you and I haven't gone out to those folks, we haven't shown that

we care about them. The right wing has been very successful, much more so than we have been, in connecting with those folks.

I guess that is true, but I don't know. I just think the right wing has the media. They have the airwaves, they have cable. Fox News is the most widely watched TV news show. So, these people are just seeing what they are fed by Republicans. What are we going to do, drive to their farms and convince them? They believe what they see on TV and the Republicans own the airwaves. I don't think it is a lack of effort, I think it is just hard to beat that.

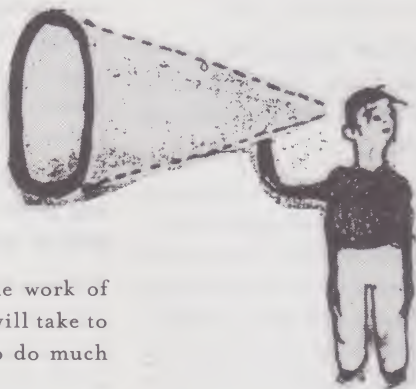
Sure, but those very same areas—whether it is in Kansas or in Sheridan County where I am from—once upon a time, they were not just voting left, but radical left. I have seen the right make inroads because the agricultural economy is terrible, the family farm is going extinct, and people are being driven off of that land. The irony is that the policies of Bush have made this far worse, yet we are not reaching them with our message!

That's why Rock Against Bush could reach people, because we have a medium to reach

MEDEA BENJAMIN

When I said earlier that Code Pink has been covered favorably by the media, I should've put a caveat there. The coverage is usually about 15 seconds, so it certainly doesn't go into any depth. It's very hard to get into depth in the media today, to really educate other women. That means that we have to do a better job of outreach ourselves. We spend an inordinate amount of time talking to each other, instead of reaching out to women of color in our communities:

poor women in our communities, rural women, military moms, the wives and daughters of people in the military. We have to be a lot more strategic about the kind of alliances we make and the time we put into education. This year Code Pink really wants to strengthen the work of our local groups so that they will take to heart this recommendation to do much



more strategic outreach. If we learn anything from the Republicans, the strategy is to make the connections, to recognize that building a web of networks and coalitions has to be part of our ongoing activities and not something we just do at election time. ©

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people. We have records, the Internet, shows, a community. That's why it is perfect for Punkvoter to exist. But these farmers in the middle of nowhere aren't part of anything. There's no sense of community beyond church ... and we know where the church stands.

I understand your point, but I can't quite agree. If we are not careful and don't look at the radical elements that exist within some of these religious communities and try to speak their language and connect with them, then we are actually helping the Republicans.

How can you really go to church and change these peoples' minds?

Churches are powerful community institutions, and at least in the African American community, they have been a very important part of the progressive movement. Now the Republicans have largely co-opted the religious label, the "moral" banner. What do you think about the claim that "moral values" tipped this election?

I think the gay marriage issue probably had some play in there, with the churches. It's

funny because maybe the most effective thing that George Bush did was to try to get an anti-gay marriage amendment into the Constitution. I just think that is insulting to human beings ... it is not even arguable. You can't even have a debate about this. I could have a debate about the war, the economy, everything else, because there are at least two sides to every issue. But there are no two sides to this. One is human rights, and the other ... it just makes no sense.

Labor unions are another very important grassroots structure . . .

Absolutely, but those are all the traditional ones, unions and church, but what else is there? How do you reach the normal people who are not in the union or don't go to church, how do you reach them? The only way to reach them is through TV and media and we can't get them that way. So I don't know if Punkvoter is a model for how to win the country back, because you need a community before you can influence a community. You cannot go door-to-door and convince anyone anything, you just

can't! But you can talk to a friend, and convince them. But you need to have that connection already built in.

We have to find the places where communities exist, where people are, and figure out how to connect in.

All we have to do is to keep our generation voting. We will win because we have the numbers and we have time on our side. The biggest Bush supporters were white men over 65 and they are dying and we're not ... so we just have to keep battling, keep it together, keep everyone united. Because time is on our side. And sometimes you need the pendulum to swing really far back, people need to see how bad things can get before they are really going to change it. I also think that everyone should really live your life, have fun, and don't let the bastards bring you down too much. We will continue to fight them, but we will also continue to party and have a good time. That's why they are so pissed at us anyway, because we're having a better time than they are! [Laughs.] ©

WILLIAM ETUNDI



For everyone who didn't want to get out of bed on the morning of November 3rd William Etundi offers these words of wisdom: "Fuck George Bush. We used this as an excuse to get people together, to build stronger networks, stronger support, stronger infrastructure for organizing in New York City."

Etundi is an activist and member of the May First Technology Collective. Since 1999, May First—originally Media JumpStart—has been providing high-quality, mission-focused technological support to the nonprofit community of New York. Proving that a not-for-profit technology collective is financially sustainable, May First has worked with nearly 150 non-profit organizations throughout the city. So when Etundi and the collective's four other members heard the Republican National Convention would be coming to their hometown in 2004, they jumped into action. They spent the year leading up to the convention developing new ways for activists, organizers, and groups to stay in touch with one another. For many activists who descended

on New York for the RNC, May First's CounterConvention.org was an invaluable resource for protesters to find information on everything related to the convention protests. The collective developed the software platform for the website and trained several activists as moderators. The platform was so successful that it was used again for the Inauguration protests in January.

So if Etundi can see the silver lining after knowing the outcome of the election, anyone can. Take his word for it: the networks and coalitions that were developed for the RNC are still in tact. Activists and organizations are focusing, communicating, and working like never before. He's seen a real change in the way activists make a difference in his town. New York is gearing up for mayoral elections, and Mark Green, a progressive challenger to Michael Bloomberg, has a lot of energy behind him. Whether Green wins or loses, Etundi's excited to see people putting more energy into supporting a progressive candidate in the city.

So when you ask Etundi and the May First Technology Collective, "What's next? How do we get through the next four years?" He'll tell you there's a lot of work that still needs to get done.

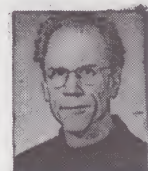
He can give you long list of ideas, websites, and organizations to get you started. So what are you waiting for ... a swift kick in butt?!

Interview by **Chad Levinson**

How did May First come together? Did you work in the corporate world first?

I did. We were a bunch of media activist people mostly from a community media outreach group called Paper Tiger Television. We started Media JumpStart because we were all doing technology consulting and media work individually for different groups, and they had this idea that we should combine our efforts and our resources, and come together to form our own organization. From the start, they wanted to look at alternative business models in order to create something that was sustainable, and they wanted to be able to provide a broad range of services. It wasn't going to be only about technology or only the media, it was about creating sustainable models for a workable media.

ROBERT McCHESNEY



On June 2, 2003, the Federal Communications Commission voted to change the rules governing media ownership to allow large media firms to get even larger.

Under the new rules, one or two companies could own the vast majority of media outlets (including newspaper and TV and radio stations) in a single city. The radio industry, which had its ownership rules greatly relaxed in 1996, provides a striking example of how rule changes affect an industry: Clear Channel, which owns over 1,200 radio stations—frequently more than one in a single city—and Viacom's Infinity, ranked numbers one and two in quantity of stations owned, are each bigger than the companies ranked numbers three through 25 combined.

Since 2003 over 2.3 million comments on the rules changes have been logged by the FCC. According to FCC Commissioner Michael Copps, who voted against the rule changes, 99.9 percent of the comments opposed the new ownership rules. Republican Senator John McCain also opposed the rule changes stating, "This sparked

more interest than any issue I've ever seen that wasn't organized by a huge lobby." FCC Chairman Michael Powell, son of General Colin Powell, claimed the rule changes were supported "by a silent majority of Americans."

Despite Powell's "silent majority," conservatives and liberals alike decried the new rules. Wayne LePierre of the National Rifle Association said, "Tell everyone the airwaves belong to the American people and the FCC's job is to protect the public interest—not big media barons who want a monopoly on public discourse." Even conservative columnist William Safire chimed in, "The concentration of power—political, media, cultural—should be anathema to conservatives."

On July 23, 2003, just over a month after the rule changes were passed, the House of Representatives voted 400 to 21 for an appropriations bill that blocked the implementation of a rule that would permit a single corporation to own television stations reaching 45 percent of Americans. In June of 2004, a federal court overturned most of those June 2003 FCC rule changes. The FCC is in the process of holding six official hearings on localism in broadcasting, which presents the

sole in-person opportunity for citizens across the US to state how well broadcast media are serving local communities.

Robert McChesney, professor of communications at the University of Illinois, stands at the forefront of the grassroots media reform movement. A firm believer in the power of a well-informed democracy, McChesney is author of eight books on media policy and activism, including *Rich Media: Poor Democracy* and most recently, *The Problem with the Media*. McChesney founded the media activist group Free Press in 2002 and has been a key voice in the fight against the increasing concentration of media by corporate powers.

I interviewed McChesney for this article (as well as for the radio program *Fire on the Prairie*—see fireontheprairie.com) shortly before the end of 2004 about the current state of media reform.

Interview by **Aaron Sarver**

The thing about the media reform movement that surprises people is that it has a lot of Re-

WILLIAM ETUNDI

¶ The goal wasn't to have a huge organization; the goal is to build something sustainable. There's no growth plan. There's no ambition. Sometimes we talk about growing, we went from four to five people, and we have discussed the possibility of including a sixth person. But for the most part, we want to stick with something that works. It's not about growing throughout the world, or even the city, it's about having a collective workplace that is truly functional for the people who work there, and ensuring that it can support them.

On some level do you look to prove to skeptics that a collective model works?

A big part of our mission is learning how to create a sustainable workplace. That means having full benefits, packages that extend benefits to non-traditional partners and non-official relationships, even trying to figure out how they can apply to non-romantic relationships. We have a whole process for how we deal with that. We discuss the way we work with clients, the way

we work with partners, and the way we participate in activism. ¶ Going back to when you asked if I have worked in a corporate setting before: I have, but most of the people in the group have not. We come from a diverse set of backgrounds: Josué comes from a labor organizing background; Allison Palmer worked with the National Employment Law Project (NELP); Jaime was a Paper Tiger person and did a lot of queer organizing; Laimah has an arts background and worked with MediaLink. My background is as an activist. ¶ I am the only one with a corporate background. I found myself accidentally working in advertising during the dot-com boom. I worked for a small startup that got eaten by a big advertising company, and I got caught in the middle. In some ways it was incredibly fun. It paid ridiculously well. It required a lot of drinking and drugs to get through it though. All the hierarchy and the bullshit drove me crazy. Because we were the creative department, we were really full of ourselves. We were kind of like

the darlings of the company. On some level it was completely self-destructive. The entire time I was there I wanted to quit. Every single day I went to work I thought about quitting, even though I had nothing to fall back on. From a political standpoint I was just like, "I'm going crazy here." I was actually involved in child marketing.

That's truly the dark side of the business.

Exactly. Although, it's not as if we were marketing guns or cigarettes; it was mostly stuff like Trix and Lucky Charms, all the General Mills cereals.

Mostly pushing sugar on people?

It was way more ridiculous than that. It was more like, figuring out how to create relationships between the kids and these cereal icons. I would just sit there during these meetings and I couldn't fucking believe the conversation was actually happening. We were sitting around discussing the personality of the Honeybee from Honeynut Cheerios, and trying to understand which

ROBERT McCHESNEY

publican support. Richard Burr, a Republican who was just elected to the Senate from North Carolina, said, "I am a conservative. I believe in free markets and limited government, but I also believe in another important conservative ideal: the right of local citizens to influence decisions that impact their communities." If we have a majority of Democrats and Republicans opposing huge media conglomerates, why haven't we seen significant media reform on the books?

One of the exciting things about media reform activism is that there are places where there can be alliances with people across the political spectrum. The other thing that's great about it is that media reform policies cover 35 or 40 different tangible areas. It's not like campaign finance reform, where you put all of your chips in one number and you either win everything or you lose everything. Here you could have small discreet victories in different areas that you can win and you can keep. So it's not such a Herculean task to take on the corporate media system. And because of that, there are a number of these issues where you can find consid-

erable support across the political spectrum. Conservatives, for example, like the idea of local media ownership. They don't like the idea of having everything concentrated into a handful of big conglomerates' hands. Many of the principled conservatives have been strong allies on efforts to keep local ownership of media in place and have regulations to enforce that. So someone like William Safire in the *New York Times* has written eight, nine, 10 columns on this in the last two years. I don't think he's ever written any other column I agree with, but on this issue I'm in complete accord with him. ¶ Conservatives are concerned and troubled by the hyper-commercialization of this media system. They don't like to see their children's brains marinated in advertising any more than anyone else does. And we find that they are tremendous allies on those issues. Within the conservative community you have a pull between the Wall Street, big money, real politick conservatives—the Karl Rove/Dick Cheney crowd—that basically want to serve their corporate masters, versus your rank-and-file conservatives from out beyond the

The problem is that if we let companies dominate conventional media, all evidence indicates they will then come to dominate what comes later, too.

beltway, whose vision of conservatism isn't one of just making rich people richer, although that might be what it ends up being. And we find lots of common ground with those sorts of conservatives and it is very exciting.

What's the entry point for people who don't live in liberal enclaves to learn about media issues?

In the case of Free Press, it's real obvious how we get outside our constituencies. We do hard, on-the-ground organizing on issues that matter in the community. That draws people in. ¶ We've been working on local media own-



of his personality traits people could identify with the most, and how we wanted to develop it further. I know more about the Honeynut fucking Honeybee than anyone ever should. So I eventually quit and started to do my own stuff.

So for the most part, are May First clients coming to you?

Yeah, like any industry, the social justice community and the not-for-profit community is very well networked. Each May First staff member has a background in a different area of social justice, so we're pretty well connected to our client base. We have friends and acquaintances we met while doing social justice work, or sometimes we meet people through the work that we do. And then there's word of mouth, someone who works for one of our clients recommends us to another group.

That can be powerful.

Yeah, and we have a lot of relationships with foundations. And a foundation will pay for a

group to have some work done, so it's not like the groups are paying out of pocket.

I saw that list online; some of them are really big names. Groups that fund NPR and PBS ... these are foundations that have deep pockets.

Yeah, but most of the groups that we work with are smaller grassroots organizations with small staffs and small budgets.

Do you have a sliding scale policy?

We do. And it works out really well for us. The work we do for large organizations makes up the work we're doing for the smaller organizations.

I don't want to be crude, but how do May First members get paid?

We all get a salary and benefits.

One of your biggest concerns is providing a healthy workspace for the staff. That includes full benefits and that's something that doesn't come cheap no matter who you are. How do you do it?

Each May First staff member has a background in a different area of social justice, so we're pretty well connected to our client base."

We have good insurance because that's part of a healthy workplace, but it's expensive. It used to be that we didn't have to pay for office space, but now we have that expense. And it's been a little bit of a challenge to meet that, but we are managing it. Each staff member works at least three billable hours a day, which leaves five hours a day for making phone calls, staff meetings, trying to raise funds, taking out the garbage, getting lunch, that kind of thing. But the three billable hours each day, that was designed to match the budget that was approved by our board. And it's required in order to pay the expenses of the co-op, rent, salary, equipment,

ership, for example. We've organized hearings in Texas and South Dakota that were overwhelmingly made up of Latinos and Native Americans who are very concerned about local media. That plugs them into this movement for the first time. But it's the organizing on the ground that draws people in: doing a campaign to get malt liquor [billboard ads] out of a working-class neighborhood, for example, or [getting rid of] advertising in the schools. These are the sorts of things that you can organize in communities that are sympathetic to your cause but largely oblivious to you. ¶ I think you hit on a crucial problem that we face as progressives and that all social movements face in the United States today, which is that our rural areas are in the midst of arguably their deepest crisis since the 1930s. Yet they're not organized by progressives at all, as far as I can tell. Progressive voices are barely known there. The irony of this should not be lost on anyone who knows American history or understands it. The last time that these regions were in such a crisis they were considered the center of the left

in the United States: Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas. Minnesota and Wisconsin were the hotbeds of radical politics 100 years ago. ¶ In the media reform movement we're very fortunate in the sense that one of the greatest weaknesses of the corporate media system is that it's increasingly unprofitable to do local coverage, especially in poor areas and rural areas. So rural media has really collapsed in the last 20 years under corporate concentration. There's an understanding across the political spectrum that there is a problem here. We have to find tangible issues to work around and work through the organizations like the Farmers Union and other agricultural groups. They're already organized in those areas and we need to draw them into our struggle. So far we've found a very receptive response and we're only just beginning.

The Internet has vastly changed how people consume media in this country. Are some of the media ownership rules going to be irrelevant in a few years? If we can easily get

video broadcast via the Internet, wouldn't that diminish the impact of all the TV networks being owned by major corporations?

Perhaps. That remains to be seen. So far it hasn't. And this claim has been made for 10 years now. The argument goes that since there are all these new Internet options and new voices, then the public no longer has to worry if one company owns all the TV licenses in the community or all the radio in the country, and that we should just get rid of those restrictions. The problem is that if we let companies dominate conventional media, all evidence indicates they will then come to dominate what comes later, too. It will give them market leverage on whatever new technologies bring. So the more competitive and the more egalitarian we make our existing conventional media system, the more likely our technologies will evolve in that manner as well. The more we let concentration and hyper-commercialism persist in the current system, the more likely that, whatever the new technologies bring, they'll bring those quali-

WILLIAM ETUNDI

software, benefits—that kind of thing. It's very specifically, and rigidly, organized; it has to be. As a not-for-profit we're audited once a year and our books have to be completely clean.

You're dedicated to remaining not-for-profit?

Yes, and that can be a challenge for a technology collective. That's why having four or five people is important because there's a lot of stuff that we are all responsible for. If the collective gets too big there are too many people participating in the decision-making process and nothing gets done. There are five of us right now; we have these staff meetings twice a week, and sometimes they go on for five hours because we have so much to discuss.

Is there anyone outside these five people who helps you with the operational stuff?

We have an accountant, but that's about it. May First did a lot of work on the election, and

you participated all these networks coming together. Now that we know the outcome of the election, what do you think is next?

Well, you have to take a long-term view. This is definitely a very difficult time for this country. We should never belittle the fact that people have been—and continue to be—fucked over. It's bad, and it's going to get worse. But this nation has a long history of activism, and that's going to continue no matter what happens. There's a host of issues that we've been working on since before September 11th—before Bush came into office even—that we need to continue to do this work in our communities, in our neighborhoods, and in our cities. Those issues are effected by what happens on the national level, but aren't dependant upon it.

Is it maybe the other way around? Can it affect things on the national level? Does it always

We should never belittle the fact that people have been—and continue to be—fucked over. It's bad, and it's going to get worse.

come around to the local level?

It goes both ways. As a collective, we prefer to focus on our community here in New York. What we see, for the most part, is that people are coming down from the election, and they're ready to get back to focusing on their communities again. They're saying, "Let's refocus on the issues that are right in front of us. We lost the election. The war is going to continue no matter what we do. We need to con-

ROBERT McCHESNEY

ties as well. They're really closely linked. ¶ It remains to be seen how much these new technologies will blast open the system. I think that the historical record suggests that we should be highly skeptical of these claims, especially when they come from corporate mouths. It's ironic that they claim that there is no justification for any ownership regulations because they face all this new competition from the Internet, and therefore shouldn't be limited on how many of these soon-to-be-outdated radio and TV stations they can own. If these radio and TV licenses no longer have any value, then why are they eager to buy them all up? I think they're speaking out of both sides of their mouths. They understand that there is considerable power there. The rest of us do, too.

If the Democrats were a more forceful opposition party, wouldn't the networks have to cover stories differently?

Yeah, they would. Ownership doesn't explain everything, by any means, when you analyze media and journalism in our society. Conventional journalism, especially political journalism, evolves and devolves

according to how it reflects the debate between our political elites: in other words, the range of legitimate debate in our society. And, of course, our political elites include the heads of the Democratic and Republican parties as well as big shots on Wall Street and elsewhere. One of our weak spots as the Democratic Party has continually moved to the right—and caved in, and has been a fairly conservative force on most major issues—is that there are no dissident voices among the community of respectable official sources that journalists can draw from. ¶ During the Iraq war, since the leaders of the Democratic Party caved in entirely on the Bush administration's claims, it was left to people like Robert Byrd, Dennis Kucinich and John Conyers out there in the margins—where they can easily be ignored—to raise the issues. And we now know they were telling the truth. Those journalists could ignore those in the margins by following the cues from Tom Daschle and Dick Gephardt. So we ended up with almost no debate at all on the ludicrous claims that the Bush administration made. ¶ I think that media performance would improve dramatically if we had an op-

position political party that really pushed issues aggressively and gave journalists a little wiggle room to work with.

MSNBC cancelled the *Phil Donahue Show*, which had been highly critical of the Bush administration's plans for war in Iraq and had been the station's highest rated show at the time of its cancellation. The show was clearly a money-maker, but MSNBC said it was not representing an image the network wanted to portray. In a free-market society, the show would have been picked up by another network immediately, but it wasn't. Why?

Is that what we call a rhetorical question? I think it would be more accurate to say it was doing decently as a show, but on all accounts, the Donahue show was not a smash hit. I mean it was not as if the MSNBC people were dreaming about their three-month vacation in Barbados to spend their bonuses because of the Donahue show. ¶ The point, however, is that it was doing as well or better than any other MSNBC show. The internal memo [that Jeff Cohen, executive producer of the *Phil Donahue Show*, obtained] that got leaked



tinue to stay on top of what's happening on the international and national levels, but one of the best ways to address that is to get involved in what's right outside our front door. Let's reinvest in building support for the homeless in our neighborhoods, housing in the city, education, prisoners' rights, women's rights. This is work that was going on long before the election, and the spotlight needs to come back to the community.

So rather than being discouraged, you want to refocus your efforts and keep at it?

Of course, discouragement isn't going to do anyone any good. If you look at New York City, there's some incredibly interesting stuff happening. This city has always had a long history of progressive activism.

I guess one thing that's unique to this city is that new people are coming into the city all the time. Is it possible to incorporate new people into activism? Do you have networks that ex-

tend to various places around the country?

A couple of us at May First—it wasn't an official May First project—but we got really involved in using technology services in preparation for the RNC, and these were an incredible success. Our project was focused on bringing local organizers together, leading volunteers to projects, supporting communication. We went to a lot of meetings where we discussed how to bring outside energy into the local context. That's why we decided to do CounterConvention.org. We built the platform for local groups, but it's been useful to people nationally. ¶ It's a really useful tool for people to share information, it sort of like a more focused Craig's List. The idea behind it is that the moderation is really easy and quick, so that people who have no web skills can maintain it. The whole thing was all email-based, there were no passwords ...

And you see the original list? How did the email list appear?

We had five moderators who we invited to come in for this training. It was pretty simple to learn, but it had discussion boards that covered a variety of different issues: riots, housing, volunteer, meeting notes, research, and all that stuff. It was hugely successful, and it was used again for the inaugural protests. That was really exciting. We spent a lot of time on that project, and it really paid off.

Were you subsidized for that?

Well, it didn't cost any money to build; it just took a lot of time. At May First, we're activists and organizers first, so when we heard the RNC was coming to town, we knew we were going to take a hit in our billable time. There was no doubt that we were going to do a lot of work on the protests, but that's why we all joined the collective in the first place. ©

made it clear that the overwhelming factor that influenced why Donahue was yanked was that he was seen as explicitly anti-war. And this was going right into the teeth of the invasion of Iraq. The show was seen as something that would put MSNBC in a compromising position when all the other cable TV news networks were competing over who could have the largest flag on the screen as they praised President Bush. ¶ There's clearly, as your question suggested, non-economic factors and political factors involved in why the show was canceled and why shows like that don't get picked up by other networks. There's a real bias [in corporate-owned media] toward conservative and pro-administration shows that aren't very critical of the status quo. And that points to a need for independent and alternative media, and a need for a media reform movement. We have a situation where all our largest companies like General Electric and Microsoft, which co-own MSNBC, depend upon the government for subsidies and for all sorts of licensing privileges. That puts them in a position where they have strong interests to serve the government. We need to set up a media system that has much

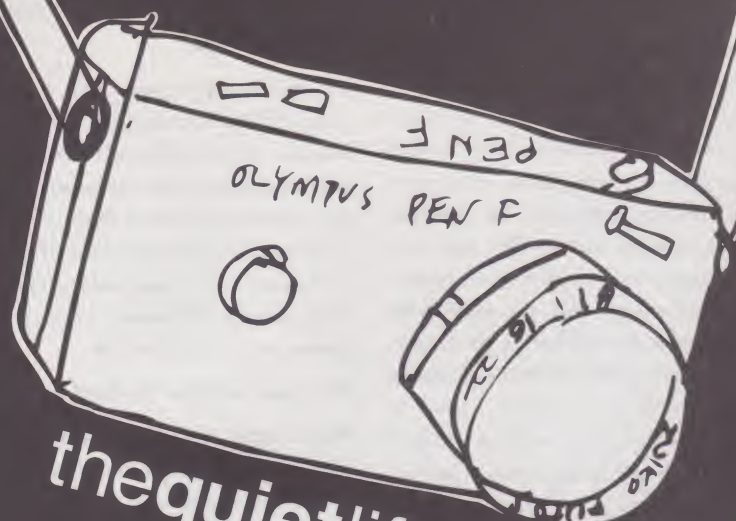
I think media performance would improve dramatically if we had an opposition political party that pushed issues aggressively and gave journalists wiggle room to work with.

stronger checks and balances and not let the corporate community, which is a small one, have so much influence over what is perceived of as news.

Yet if they cancelled Donahue, I don't understand why they haven't cancelled *The Daily Show*. The satirical attacks on the power structure that we see on *The Daily Show* are much more of a threat than Donahue ever was.

That's a really interesting point. And you're right. For one thing, *The Daily Show* is vastly more profitable than Donahue was. Its ratings are, by cable standards, quite high. It has killer demographics. It's raking in

money hand over fist for Viacom, the owner of Comedy Central, in a way that Donahue never did. So they've created enough market power to give themselves some space. ¶ But I'm reminded of a speech I heard by Ralph Nader four years ago, before he became uniformly hated, where he made a very telling comment. He was on the podium with Michael Moore then, and Moore was cracking everybody up with his jokes. Nader made the point that while it's great that we have Michael Moore and that people like him are popular in our culture, the fact that the only serious political criticism that survives in our culture comes from comedy is not something that we should be wild about. Nader said that when he visited the Soviet Union, they had the best political comedy in the world. Of course, the only place they could do anything critical was indirectly through satire or comedy. They couldn't have it in their news or their public debates. That's the lesson we really have to learn here. It's not a sign of strength that we have great political comedy, in a way it's really a sign of our weakness. ©



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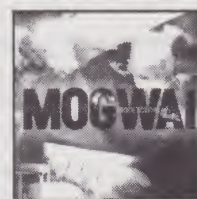


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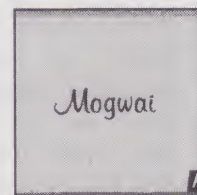
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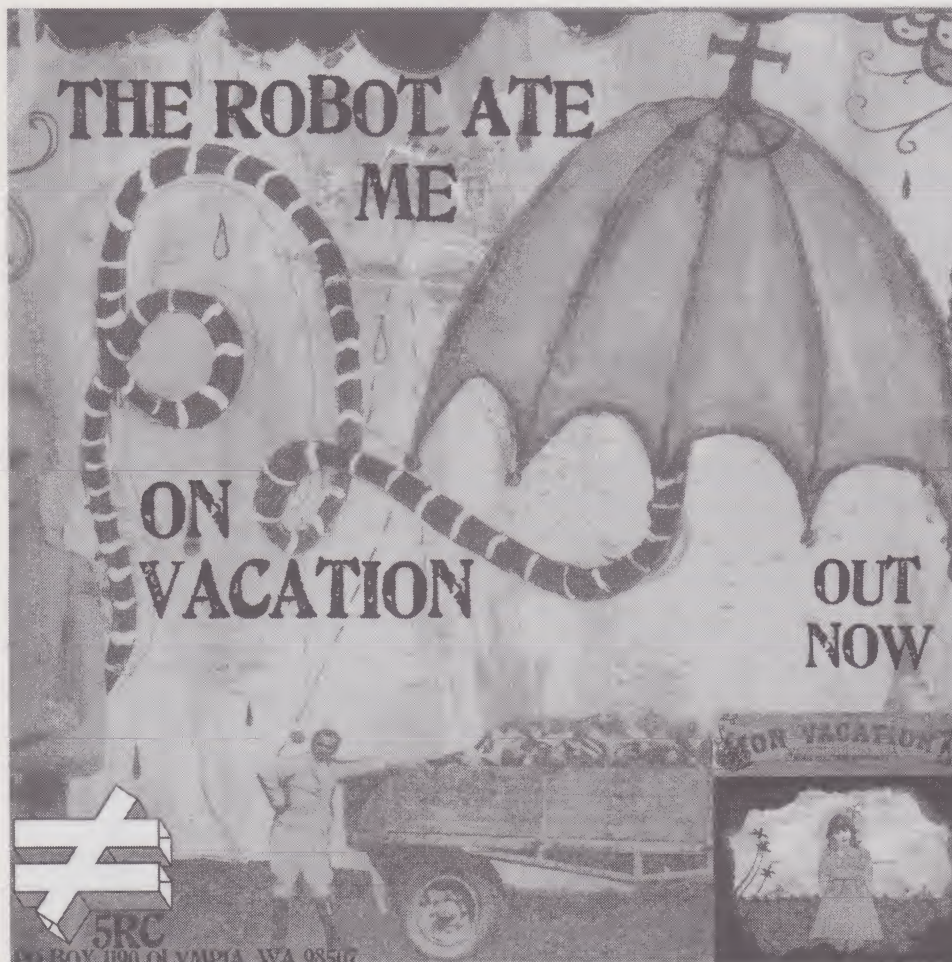
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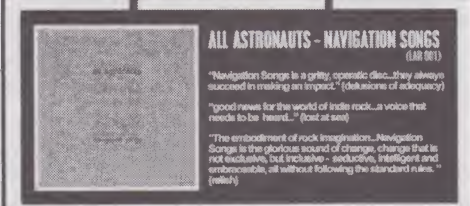
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ANY KIND MUSIC

FUCK THIS TOWN:

THE DECLINE OF COUNTRY MUSIC

The phrase “alt-country” is the “emo” of the country world: No artist or label espouses it, but everyone sort of grudgingly co-exists with it.

“If I never hear that term again, it would be too soon,” says singer Neko Case. She has it a little tougher, though, as critics often refer to her as an alt-country “chanteuse.” Other artists have found ways around it. Singer Sally Timms half-seriously refers to her work as “art country.” Singer-songwriter Robbie Fulks uses “descriptive country,” mostly because it confuses people.

“After a while it’s a non-answer answer,” he says. “We play descriptive country.’ And then they just stop talking about it.” He laughs, but he adds that he can see the validity in the dreaded alt-country moniker.

“I think there are a lot of bad people in that category,” Fulks says, “but I think it makes sense to have a category like that, something that says, ‘I’m country, but I’m not totally evil.’”

Convincing people of that, particularly those who grew up listening to punk, has gotten easier during the past decade. It’s been 10 years since alt-country pioneers Uncle Tupelo broke up, Bloodshot Records produced its first release (a compilation of Chicago underground country called *For A Life Of Sin*) and nearly 10 years since *No Depression*, the bi-monthly magazine of the alt-country scene, published its first issue. That the genre has lasted that long is a surprise to even those who were there at the start.

“It was like we put on a dance to save the teen center, but now we’ve got to run the fucking thing,” says Bloodshot Records co-owner Rob Miller of the label’s unexpected success.

That Bloodshot was founded by punks is just one of numerous parallels between the alt-country and punk-rock worlds, and the line separating them has occasionally grown blurry. And that, critics say, is precisely the problem. As alt-country grows in popularity and fans and performers with no history in country music come into the scene, some worry about the genre’s purity. More than a decade after the rise of alt-country, a debate rages about what it means, what it’s done to country music, and just who is allowed to play it.

While many may debate the merits and failings of alt-country, there’s one thing the fans of the genre can agree on: that contemporary mainstream country music is no good. Fulks suggests its current state is part of a decline that began more than 30 years ago, though its atrophy isn’t unique.

“It’s the same thing that makes Beyoncé music bad or Tom Petty music bad,” he explains. “The evolution of the music and the people that make the music is technology-driven. It’s human performance giving way to edited performances and to the values of an engineering man. Also, I think country music in particular is too market-driven and too dependent on that narrow window of program directors on commercial radio—that’s what totally drives country music.”

He knows firsthand. In addition to releasing a record on Geffen Records in 1998 (*Let’s Kill Saturday Night*), Fulks moved to Nashville in 1993 to work in music publishing after a friend scored a hit for Garth Brooks. At his job, he wrote songs in the hopes someone on Music Row, the city’s music-industry hub, would pick them up. The experience proved to be both exhausting and humiliating, and it inspired perhaps his best-known song, “Fuck This Town,” from 1997’s *Southmouth* (Bloodshot). In Nashville, Fulks “shook a lotta hands / ate a lotta lunch / wrote a lotta dumbass songs.”

Dumbass songs were *exactly* what label executives and program directors at radio stations wanted—just not, apparently, the ones Fulks wrote. At this point in the ’90s, with the success of Garth Brooks, country radio found success with songs that were country, but not *too* country.

“I remember there was a big push in the early ’90s to rid country music of any lingering Hank Williams feelings that it had,” Case says. “There were ads like ‘All Country, No Bumpkin!’ or ‘Not the Country Your Grandparents Listened To!’ or ‘Nobody’s Dog Is Gonna Die!’ It was really stupid.”

But, Case concedes, stupid sells.

“I don’t think it’s country’s fault, but bad music apparently sells a lot of ads—which makes me sad because I think people really miss out,” she says. “I’m sure they don’t know they do, but they do.”

BY KYLE RYAN

BUT COUNTRY

A DECADE OF INDIE COUNTRY, PUNK ROCK, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR COUNTRY'S SOUL



I don't really mourn the death of access to mainstream radio for mainstream folks, though, you know? You could be in the company of great independent bands, or you could be in the company of Toby Keith. Which would you choose?"

Few people besides executives of large broadcasting corporations would argue that radio has improved over the years. Fulks thinks their days could be numbered, as the Internet and satellite radio challenge the corporate radio model. But the sound of commercial radio and the process by which songs are created for it won't change. Fulks calls it "the hegemony of the machine."

"They're naturally deferential—a lot of producers are—to this idea that a record is a collage of finessed measures," Fulks says, "and the measures are finessed by this outside party that's on this 40-channel board working a lot of arcane and intimidating buttons. The more it has to do with that, the less it has to do with people rehearsing the songs and coming in and giving it all you got."

Not that Fulks shuns what the studio magicians create—the man who wrote "Fuck This Town" also confesses to enjoying Shania Twain, the archetype of what that song refers to as "soft-rock feminist crap."

"It's the total apotheosis of what I was just saying about music put together a bar at a time by engineering nerds, so I wouldn't go see Shania in concert," Fulks says. "I'm not interested in that, but as marvels of engineering, the records are really required listening for anybody in country."

Many would argue that the technical wonder that helps make artists like Twain sound sparkingly clean also makes the songs seem more generic and removed from the everyday lives of listeners. And it's because of this that while Bloodshot co-owner Nan Warshaw may run a country label, the overlap between Bloodshot's and mainstream country's audiences is virtually nonexistent.

"The more I talk to people and think about people who are listening and buying country music today, compared to who the fans of our bands are, it's completely different audiences," Warshaw says. "Commercial country is suburban mall music. It has, I think, less to do with traditional country than what our bands are doing."

Therein lies the great paradox of so-called alt-country: It's more traditional than mainstream country music, yet labeled "alternative." While radio programmers, artists and label executives pay lip service to the legacies of Johnny Cash, Hank Williams, or Merle Haggard, they push songs like Shania Twain's "That Don't Impress Me Much," which has as much to do with Johnny Cash as Madonna's "Holiday."

Current country music is "actually a kind of fantasy," says musician Jon Langford. "They might as well be singing about elves and wizards. It's completely irrelevant to people's everyday lives."

His bandmate in the Mekons, and fellow solo artist, Sally Timms agrees.

"The more traditional kind of country music that came out in the '60s and '70s—it was just grittier," Timms says. "But then again, most contemporary music now isn't very interesting. It's so packaged that I don't think any of those forms, aside from some kind of kitsch value, will be very highly regarded in 20 years' time."

While Shania Twain may represent country's crossover-minded excess, Toby Keith's shit-kickin' anthems draw the most contempt from the alt-country world. Keith was relatively successful in the 1990s with his sort of neotraditionalist country, but never had a massive commercial breakthrough. He found it after the September 11 attacks with his album *Unleashed*. It featured the time-to-kick-some-ass track called "Courtesy of The Red, White, And Blue (The Angry American)":

"An' you'll be sorry that you messed with the US of A / 'cause we'll put a boot in your ass / it's the American way."

Jingoistic anthems turned out to be extremely lucrative, and Keith followed up *Unleashed* with 2003's *Shock'n Y'all*, featuring songs such as the saccharine "American Soldier," the bizarrely messianic "If I Was Jesus," and, classiest of all, "The Taliban Song." It's about a "middle-eastern camel-herdin' man" who hates the Taliban and dreams of escaping Afghanistan on his camel (check the refrain "ride camel ride"):

"We should do real fine down around Palestine / or maybe Turkmenistan / we'll bid a fair adieu and flip a couple fingers to the Taliban (oh yeah, Taliban) / we'll bid a fair adieu and flip a big boner to the Taliban (baby)."



Country "is blue-collar music; so was punk," Sally Timms says. "It dealt with the same things; it could be political music, it could be difficult music, it could take on subject matter that affected people's regular lives, but did it in a way that people still enjoyed listening to and might dance to and might just absorb as they dance."



THREE CHORDS AND THE TRUTH: PUNK AND COUNTRY

Although he probably couldn't have anticipated what someone like Toby Keith would do with it, legendary country songwriter Harlan Howard famously referred to country music as "three chords and the truth." Not surprisingly, that sentiment plays well in the world of punk rock.

"Hank Williams Sr. was as punk as anybody," says Jon Snodgrass, singer/guitarist of the alt-country band Drag The River. "A lot of that stuff was just so bare-bones and raw and full of life, you know? It's got a lot of the same things that made me enjoy punk rock."

Jon Langford made a similar discovery when listening to a mixtape a DJ friend made for him called *Honky Tonk Classics*. Having grown up in Wales (the "Mississippi of the UK, according to Miller), Langford didn't have a terribly favorable impression of country music.

"I thought country was rubbish, just right-wing crap that wouldn't possibly be interesting," he says. "It was old man's music."

But Langford became obsessed with the artists on the mixtape and preached the country gospel to his bandmates in the Mekons, though it wasn't the music that attracted him as much as the subject matter, he says. "There was a kind of language that came in it—a playfulness, but also a seriousness to the topics and the actual engagement with everyday life—which seemed remarkably similar to our daily lives at that point."

Not long after, the Mekons released *Fear & Whiskey*, arguably the first record that had an identifiable alt-country sound. Timms, who joined the Mekons around that time, had the same kind of epiphany Langford did about country.

"It is blue-collar music; so was punk," Timms says. "It dealt with the same things; it could be political music, it could be difficult music, it could take on subject matter that affected people's regular lives, but did it in a way that people still enjoyed listening to and might dance to and might just absorb as they dance."

The message and themes weren't the only attractions; the music itself proved to be equally gripping for Dallas Good, singer/guitarist of country-psychedelic band the Sadies. He and his

brother, Travis, who's also in the Sadies, grew up in a country household. Their father, Bruce, played in legendary Canadian bluegrass band The Good Brothers. The boys were fans of punk rock, but they didn't grow up despising country music.

"There's very, very aggressive styles within every category of music," Dallas Good says. "Of course that's going to appeal to people that enjoy aggressive music. It didn't take too much time to realize that bluegrass is much faster than the fastest hardcore music."

Rob Miller made a similar discovery in high school when he stole a record from his girlfriend's mother by bluegrass legends Flatt & Scruggs. The duo were perhaps most famous for "The Ballad Of Jed Clampett," the theme song to *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Miller brought the record to practice for his punk-rock band as a joke one night.

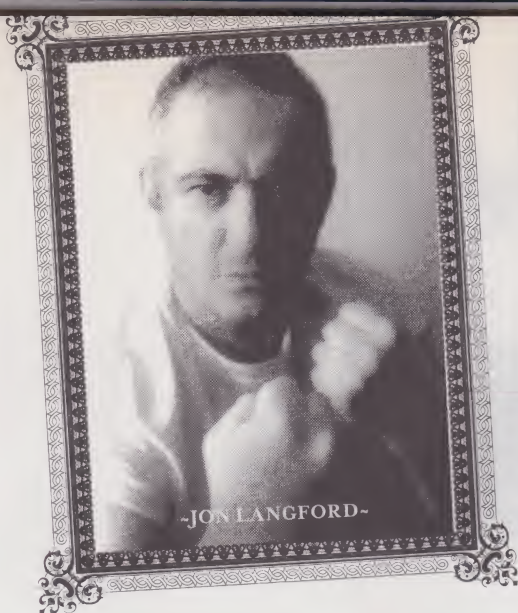
"I was like, 'Hey look at what I stole,' and we played it, and it was the fastest music we'd ever heard," Miller says. "Could we play this fast? We couldn't. We just listened to the musicianship, and it just floored us."

Jon Snodgrass had been a fan of old country music growing up, but Uncle Tupelo really inspired him, along with a legion of other fans. Uncle Tupelo had punk-rock roots, and to Snodgrass, they sounded like a country version of his favorite band, Hüsker Dü. He avoided playing a similar style, though, because he lived in St. Louis, practically Uncle Tupelo's hometown. He eventually started playing in the punk band Armchair Martian and moved to Colorado.

There, he met another Uncle Tupelo fan named Chad Price, who had been singing for punk legends All. Together they formed Drag The River as a side project, enlisting the help of fellow punk rocker JJ Nobody from the Nobodys. Their punk-rock pedigree made for some surprised fans once Drag The River began playing. During their first tour, promoters enthusiastically touted them as members of All and Armchair Martian.

"When we first started touring, we would get like a lot of All fans at the shows having no idea what we were," Price says, "but surprisingly, everybody was really cool with it."

Other bands embrace their punk backgrounds more directly. "High Life," the first track on the self-titled debut by Whiskey & Co., actually lifts a verse from "Start Today" by Gorilla Biscuits.



It's one way the Florida band has tried to bring punk to country.

"As long as you're writing music, part of your soul is going to come through," says vocalist Kim Helm. "It doesn't really matter what genre you're in."

Whiskey & Co. have stayed pretty close to their punk roots; No Idea Records, home to bands like Planes Mistaken For Stars and J Church, released their album last year, though Whiskey & Co. is the lone country band on the roster.

"When Var [Thelin, co-owner] decided to put out the record, I was a little worried," says Helm, who also works at No Idea while attending grad school in Gainesville. "I mean, I was glad he was putting it out, but we are unlike anything that ever comes off of No Idea, and we did get a lot of people that were like 'What?'"

"We're not a punk-rock band on a punk-rock label, which is sad in a way because I don't think there should be any reason why you can't be a punk-rock country band," Helm says.

When Whiskey & Co. toured with Hot Water Music and Against Me!, they were met with many blank stares, but they also received compliments from some people—usually the older ones—after the show. That's no fluke; it seems that most people rediscover country music once they hit their mid-to-late 20s, particularly if they grew up with punk rock.

"Time went from being 19-year-old fresh-faced punk rockers to being 28-year-old guys who have relationships that have broken up and actively drank too much and spent a lot of time sitting around in bars," Jon Langford says. "We were kind of world-weary. It's funny to think about it now; at that age—26, 27—we had gotten a bit old man-ish. We felt like we had been through the wringer."

Punk rock tends to change how its proponents see the world; as punk rockers age, it becomes more of an idea and less tied to a specific sound. At 15, country music is heresy; at 25, it's a mirror of the foundation of punk rock. Langford puts it simply: "Country is punk music for old people."

"When you grow up in that scene, when you get older, and you no longer want to burn down the governor's mansion or destroy the world or whatever," Miller says, "you are seeing this other kind of music that is also very simple, very straightforward, very direct. It has an immediate connection with the audience."

"People will pick up a Robbie record or a Bobbie [Bare Jr.] record and say, 'I don't hear any punk in here,'" Miller continues. "It's more in the ethos and the way that we run the business."

WHO'S COUNTRY IS THIS, ANYWAY?

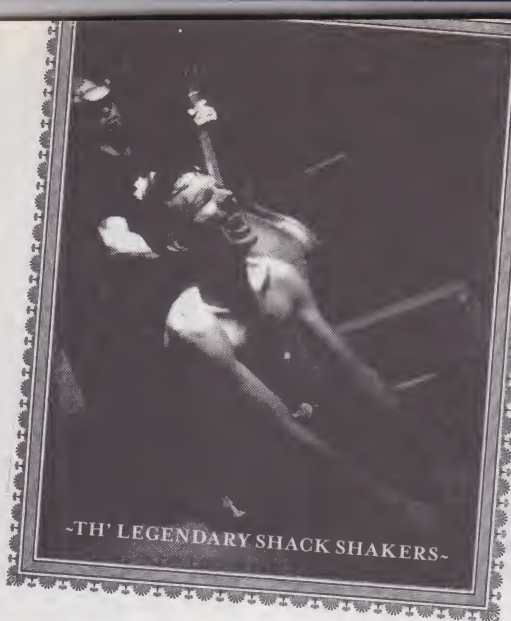
While Bloodshot's artist-friendly ethos makes them attractive to performers, others—sometimes their own bands—have criticized what the label represents. When Bloodshot released *Cockadoodledon't* by Th' Legendary Shack Shakers in 2003, vocalist Colonel JD Wilkes felt apprehensive about the association.

"We knew we would be kind of damned into a world that was sort of dying as far as hip factor and sex appeal is concerned," Wilkes says. "But I see the alt-country thing as kind of the neofolk scare that's mostly guys that appreciate country music but are masquerading as farmers when they're really sort of socialist intellectuals, and that's foreign to my experience as a guy from sub-rural Kentucky."

"Most of the people that I know from that area, you know, they like having guns, and they're not for gay marriage," Wilkes continues. "It's all these issues that Bloodshot and *No Depression* magazine support that don't really reflect the attitude of the red states. That just seems a little strange to me."

Not surprisingly, the band left Bloodshot (located in blue Illinois) after *Cockadoodledon't* and released their latest, *Believe*, last year on Yep Roc Records (located in red North Carolina). The blue-versus-red analysis is a bit faulty here, though, as Chicago served as the nation's hub of country music for a healthy chunk of the 20th century. That status came from the mostly forgotten National Barn Dance, broadcast by radio station WLS. It ran from 1924 to 1960, and during that time it was the end-all/be-all of country music.

Regardless, the question of country "authenticity" is one that Miller doesn't take lightly. "It's an argument that, depending on when you catch me, I'll either just kindly dismiss," Miller says, "or if we go to a bar right now, I can go on a one-hour rant about how intellectually flimsy an argument it is, because who belongs to country? Is there going to be some sort of arbiter of genetic authenticity of who can do this music? It's just not valid."



To placate critics, he rattles off the Southern home states of 12 of the bands that have been integral to the label's development, from Ryan Adams to Trailer Bride to the Old 97s (North Carolina, Mississippi and Texas, respectively). "It's not really a John Kerry-ish Northeastern cabal of intellectuals," he says.

Are people in Maine not allowed to play country music simply because of their home state? The argument goes. Or is country only for people from a rural area? Why not cities? The same authenticity argument rages in every genre. Who's punk rock? Do white people have a place in hip-hop?

Jamie Barrier of The Pine Hill Haints can see both Miller and Wilkes' points. Barrier grew up in Alabama and now lives just across the state line in rural Tennessee. The Haints' sound doesn't quite fit a particular classification; it's a mix of bluegrass, folk and country, all of it distinctly Southern. But he concedes that country music has no "home"; it just happened to be popularized in the South.

"In a lot of ways I agree with JD Shack Shaker regarding 'Northern' people taking an old Southern tradition and giving it rules, running the show, calling the shots, executing artists and all that," Barrier says. "Like sometimes the Haints will play with a 'country' band from Europe or New York City or the Northeast, then we'll meet them, and they treat us like Alabama morons who don't get it."

If anyone "gets it," Barrier does. As a child, his grandfather took him to community hootenannies out in the country where people gathered to sing songs all night long. The tradition continues today, and Barrier still participates when he's not on tour.

"That's more than just music, more than Uncle Tupelo," Barrier says. "It's like pumping gas at a random catfish house and hearing old men talk. It's a poetry; it's a distinct way that the community in the rural South phrases things and words; the way people choose to express being broke or hungry or stoned, the way they cook their greens and grits, and the music is an extension. It's not a solo artist who was a Hank fan. It's part of the culture."

For Bloodshot, it was never about Uncle Tupelo either (neither Warshaw nor Miller were fans) or a mere fondness for country icons. The label has also strenuously avoided anything resembling shtick.

"The bands that made me insane are bands that we've got a dumpster full of demos of people that are like the Tractor King Howdy Boys and the Pitchfork Trio and all that shit," Miller says. "They're throwing hay around on stage and wearing straw hats. And it is shtick—shtick I can't stand."

Unfortunately, there are hundreds of bands or musicians for whom shtick is an innate part of their conception of country music. Maybe thousands of them. Jon Langford and Robbie Fulks felt like they've played with all of them.

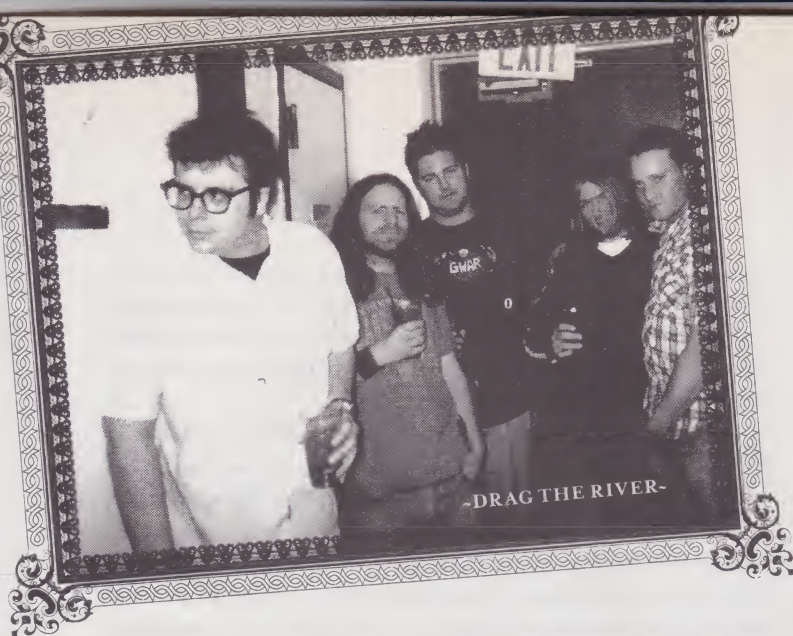
"The promoter will say 'We gotta band that sounds just like you, and they're opening for you tonight,'" Fulks says. "You're gonna love 'em. They're like the Knoxville equivalent of Robbie Fulks.' Just because this has happened like 50 times, I'm like, 'Oh my god, I can't wait to see what this person thinks sounds like me.'" He laughs. "It's always something really horrible, you know? It's a bunch of people pretending to be hillbillies in overalls and screaming, and they can't play their banjos, and it's all a theatrical presentation. That's really obsessed me over the years: Is that what people hear when I'm playing?"

Barrier has had few run-ins with such *Hee-Haw* types on the Haints' many tours, though he tends to encounter snotty traditionalists who critique his playing style or dismiss him as an "Alabama moron." For the jokey country bands, the presentation may just be their shield.

"A lot of those country bands, it almost seems like they're making fun of it," Snodgrass says. "Or maybe they kind of liked it, but they didn't really know how to write it, and they didn't know how people would take it if they did write country songs, so they'd do it tongue-in-cheek."

Listening to Drag The River's album *Closed* might make listeners wonder if Snodgrass and Price's tongues are there, too. Nearly all of the 14 songs talk about cirrhosis-inducing amounts of drinking (practically a country-music cliché). There's also a sort of religious ballad, "Life Of Ruin," where Price begs Jesus to save him from himself, though to cynical ears it may sound like a parody of that old country staple, the spiritual ballad. But Price insists there's no irony involved. Yes, they drink that much, and "Life Of Ruin" isn't their take on what a redemption song would





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sound like; it is a redemption song. "I'm not writing anything just to draw people into like, 'Oh yeah, they're country,' you know?" Price says. "It's all real."

Whiskey & Co. have numerous tales of hard drinking and hard living on their debut album, but there are also songs obviously written from a male point of view, which Helm's bandmates wrote before she joined the band. "Barroom Women" talks about having "\$15 for a whore" before the refrain of "all you barroom women I like you best."

"That's another thing we get a lot of flack for because people say it doesn't sound authentic to have a woman singing songs from a male point of view, which I can agree with," Helm says. Whiskey & Co. wrote all their new material together, so Helm is anxious to record new songs without the personal disconnect.

Langford and Timms, being native Europeans, have to answer for a lot more when the authenticity argument comes their way. Timms has made two country records, and her latest album, *In The World Of Him* (Touch & Go), features songs written by Langford and Ryan Adams.

"When I made a country record, some people would very occasionally go, 'You don't really have the credentials to be able to sing a country record,'" Timms says. "But I'm not singing in a fake American accent and pretending I grew up in the Appalachians."

"I always thought of myself more as a singer and an interpreter, so I don't see why I should be contained in one genre. Why can't I make a country record if I want to?"

Langford's made more than a few of them; the Bloodshot catalogue would be missing a sizeable chunk without his contributions as a solo artist and with the bands the Waco Brothers and the Pine Valley Cosmonauts. He also paints portraits of country-music icons based on their old publicity photos, though he's taken to blindfolding them, scratching their faces, or replacing their heads with skulls in his paintings. He also once took headstones he created with the names of country-music legends and placed them in front of the headquarters of various record labels in Nashville. That a European would pull such shenanigans is more than enough to rile traditionalists.

But Langford also had a habit of irking Europeans. After he became obsessed with country music, Langford and friends would

perform songs by legendary country singer Buck Owens at shows in Leeds, much to the confusion—or outright irritation—of the locals.

People in Chicago, where he eventually moved, celebrated him for it. The city had a popular country-western club called the R&R Ranch near downtown, home of the long-running local country band the Sundowners.

"I'd get up on stage on a Saturday night with the Sundowners and do all these songs with a room full of drunken urban Appalachians dancing, smoking, and drinking and giving me the time of day," Langford says. "It was a sort of trial by fire because they could have been like, 'We know you're from Wales! You're not country! Go away!' If they had said that to me, I would have never, ever played that again."

Instead, he's performed twice at the Grand Ole Opry with The Waco Brothers. At his core, though, Langford says he's a punk rocker, and he has his own qualms with inauthentic alt-country.

"You know, the whiney singer-songwriters with their friggin' acoustic guitars perpetuating fucking myths about the wind blowing in their hair," he says. "[Those] were the people we were trying to destroy, you know?"

Somewhere, there's an acoustic singer-songwriter writing about the breeze on the plains and thinking that Langford doesn't have a clue. Just like in every other genre, fans of country music will endlessly debate who's real and who's a poser: too country, not country enough, too jokey, too serious, too Northern to be authentic, too Southern to be worldly.

In alt-country, where genres mix and match, steady footing can be hard to find. A decade after releasing their first album, Bloodshot's Warshaw and Miller not only understand that, but expect it.

"We may be the standard bearers of the alt-country music from the punk perspective," Warshaw says, "but from the Americana perspective, we're still the red-headed stepchild."

"Yeah, we can't do anything right," Miller adds. "You get the alt-country fascists hating the record because it doesn't fit within their parameters, then everybody else who's already made up their mind about the whole spectrum of alt-country going, 'Oh that's alt-country. I don't like that.' With a genre that rides musical boundaries, we're riding a fence that's on top of a smaller fence." ©



"Every citizen of this country who is registered to vote should be guaranteed that their vote matters, that their vote is counted, and that in the voting booth of their community, their vote has as much weight as the vote of any Senator, and Congressperson, any President, any cabinet member, or any CEO of any Fortune 500 Corporation."

—Barbara Boxer, Senator (D) California, January 6, 2005.

On October 15, 2004, Liza Case of Seattle, Washington, completed and mailed her absentee ballot from her home in Seattle's Greenlake neighborhood, where she has lived for five years, to the King County Department of Elections. Liza has been a registered voter in Washington since she turned 18 in 1991 and has always voted absentee. She had no difficulty transferring her registration when moving; she keeps up with the issues and believes that "voting is a right that carries heavy responsibility and is not simply a privilege to be discarded."

On November 2, Liza received a perplexing letter. Dated October 20, it arrived in a dirtied envelope and informed Liza that her signature was not on file with the King County Elections office—therefore her ballot would not be counted unless she re-filed her signature using the enclosed form by November 7. With a few hours left on election day, Liza turned around and headed to her assigned polling place, where she waited in line for over an hour and a half before completing paperwork and showing her identification and voter registration card to poll workers to verify her ballot.

Neither of these documents is required to vote in Washington; my partner's and my registration cards never arrived at our rental house since we changed registration last April. When I called the elections office in August, I was promised they were "in the mail" and should arrive that day or the next. They never arrived; instead, I verified online that my partner and I were registered at our new address, and we voted in both the primary and general elections this fall. Without knowing our precinct, we told poll volunteers our names and simply checked in at every table in the church basement until we found our names. Early on November 2, we waited in line a few minutes for a free place to stand and cast our vote in semi-private; I finished first and had a few minutes to observe a dim poll worker nearby who had difficulty with the procedure of tearing ballot stubs and having voters sign the correct line in the role book. (I have also since verified that both our ballots were received at the polling place via the Seattle Times website, which provided access to a database of voters in the November election.)

Across the nation, things were going differently. As Liza waited over 90 minutes in Seattle to get help with her ballot, thousands of Ohio voters were walking away from the polls because the wait was simply too long—parents, caretakers, people with jobs to go to could not afford to wait, often in the rain, four or more hours to cast a ballot. Voters at Kenyon College waited until 4 a.m. to vote on one of the two machines provided for

1,300 expected voters. Why was there such a backup? In Franklin County, elections officials provided only 2,798 voting machines when they knew they needed 5,000—and for unknown reasons, held back 68 machines in warehouses, 42 of them from predominantly African-American districts.

Thanks to the electoral college system, Kerry conceded to Bush on November 3. As liberals around the nation sought solace and initiated self-flagellation, Democratic Washingtonians comforted themselves with two Democratic, female Senators and a Democratic majority in both the state house and senate. Yet neither of our gubernatorial candidates made so much as a nod of defeat for weeks after the election as county after county worked to tally 2.8 million votes across the state.

In the September primary, Democrat Christine Gregoire had won strongly over former City Attorney and mayoral candidate Mark Sidran and King County Executive Ron Sims, who had publicized Gregoire's participation in a whites-only sorority at the University of Washington in the 1960s. The primary may have mislead Gregoire into complacency—it was the first time most Washingtonians had to select a party ballot in the primary, and a comparison of votes for Kerry (1,510,201) to votes for Gregoire (1,373,361) make it clear that many Democrats in Washington failed to vote the straight ticket in the General Election.

Gregoire, Washington's Attorney General for three terms and a leader in the significant multi-state anti-tobacco lawsuit, had a reputation for blaming underlings for problems in her office, such as missing an appeal filing deadline that could have saved the state millions. Her Republican opponent, Dino Rossi, was a real estate agent and former state senator with a personable flair, a penchant for cutting business taxes and a strong anti-abortion stance. Rossi connected with voters, had the Republican machine and conservative lobbying groups like the Building Industry Association of Washington behind him, not to mention the Democrats' natural ability to self-destruct.

An initial Gregoire lead by 7,000 votes on election night dissolved into disputes over ballots by November 12, when the absentee ballots reversed the lead by 2,123 to Rossi. Then, the state Democratic Party sued King County for information on provisional ballots in danger of being disqualified, and went on a house-to-house mission to obtain over 400 signed voter affidavits to verify ballots. On November 17, all counties certified their original counts, and Rossi was ahead by 261 votes—out of 2.8 million total ballots, a victory of such a small percentage point that it triggered an automatic machine recount under state law. (The third party candidate, Ruth Bennett, a Libertarian, garnered 63,465 votes in the final tally, 2.26 percent of the total votes cast.) The machine recount was certified on November 30, with Rossi winning by 42 votes.

Democrats refused to accept this result. Voting irregularities continued to emerge, including provisional ballot problems



count out

While reports of voting irregularities criss-crossed the nation this November, Washington State's hundred-vote differential gubernatorial election served to remind many how every vote truly does count—if it's counted at all, that is.

By Daphne Adair

and issues with voting machines in Snohomish County, north of Seattle, which were reported to pre-select the Republican candidate, or to select the Republican when a stylus was used to select the Democratic candidate, then freeze when a voter tried to change the selection. "Statistical analysis shows high correlation between reported voting irregularities and high Republican voting results," reads the Snohomish Count Executive Summary. Additionally, the report states that "statistical analysis of [recently repaired machines] shows a propensity for Republican voting that is present but weak on the individual level but strong at the polling location where the machines were placed."

It was clear that something was afoot in Washington State, and Gregoire pressed for an expensive and time-consuming hand recount to get to the bottom of it. To pay for the hand recount, Democrats raised a required \$730,000 deposit, including contributions of \$250,000 each from the Kerry campaign; the Democratic National Committee and Moveon.org, as well as major contributions from labor unions. Overall, the state Democratic Party has raised at least \$1.5 million since election day. Republicans have also raised hundreds of thousands since election day to pay lawyers and court fees. The recount deposit will be refunded to Democrats if the election results ultimately overturn the two prior counts.

The unprecedented statewide recount began December 8, 2004. Teams of one Republican and one Democratic volunteer counted stacks of ballots, with a recorder at the table to tally votes and observers standing close by. Vote-counters were asked to use their judgment according to a set of rules; for example, voters who selected Gregoire and also penned her name in the write-in section were judged valid Gregoire votes, rather than over-votes (ballots with two different candidates selected, and therefore invalid).

Karyn Quinlan counted ballots in King County, the state's most populous, urban, and "blue" region. Here, as Quinlan writes in the *Seattle Weekly*, the GOP apparently developed daily "talking points" for Republican volunteers recounting the nearly 900,000 votes cast in the county. "One day it was all about 'over-votes,'" she writes, and describes "smudges and stray spots of ink from other ballots" being used to contest Gregoire ballots at her table. "It was entirely feasible that such a strategy could make the critical difference between winner and loser. Within a day, the election officials got hip to the scheme and instructed all ballot counters to henceforth refer all over-votes to the canvassing board," effectively ending that tactic.

During the hand recount, King County discovered over 700 ballots mistakenly rejected by election workers. On December 14, the state Supreme Court rejected a Democratic petition to force counties to reconsider about 3,000 ballots, including the 700 in King County; by December 17, Rossi was leading by 49 votes with

all counties in but King. And that day, Republicans obtained a temporary restraining order blocking King County from counting their 700-plus uncounted ballots. The counting went on and by December 22, Gregoire was ahead by 10 votes, without the 700 extra King County ballots.

As Liza heard this news, she says she was "happily thinking, 'Gee, I'm glad I took care of my vote when I did.'" Then, the phone rang. A volunteer calling on behalf of the Washington State Republican Party asked if she had voted in the November 2 election, and for whom. Liza was proud to answer that she had voted for Christine Gregoire. The caller thanked Liza for her time, and hung up. At first, Liza attributed the call to the continual fundraising for recounts and legal fights. But the next day when a Democratic Party volunteer called to ask if Liza had voted and for whom, the caller told her something disturbing: "Ms. Case, are you aware that your absentee ballot is one among the 700 disputed ballots?"

Liza says she was stunned—and angry. She believes the Republicans were doing an informal survey of uncounted ballots. "No wonder the Republicans were fighting so hard against counting those votes!" she says. "They knew exactly who the 700 voted for and how they knew who would win if they were counted."

The volunteer for the Democrats met Liza at her office and had her sign a new voter registration and affidavit for the canvassing board—the same forms she had filled out on Election night.

In the end, the Supreme Court threw out the restraining order against counting the 700 ballots and on December 30, Secretary of State Sam Reed certified the election with Gregoire winning by 129 votes. Had the election finally ended? Liza's vote, among so many others, had been contested and verified twice, and finally was counted. But there was still a way to challenge the election: the courts. On January 3, two months after Election day, two private citizens filed challenges with the Supreme Court and Rossi announced on January 7 that he, too, would challenge the election.

Each day, new allegations arise to be investigated by old and new media alike; traditional media serves to amplify the news and verify facts and fictions dug up by intrepid bloggers. A campaign at www.revotewa.com run by Sharon Gilpin—whom Rossi had previously employed to help set up his transition team—created radio ads featuring a father distraught that his son, stationed in Iraq, didn't receive his absentee ballot until November 3. Investigation revealed the soldier had time to submit his ballot, by state law. The question remained: Were the ballots mailed on time? A *Seattle Times* headline on January 10, 2005, "Feds threatened suit over military ballots," implied they were not. On January 13, Keith Ervin wrote for the *Times*, "The date of the military mailings became controversial this week, as commentators on web logs

and talk radio suggested that King County officials lied when they said ballots had been mailed Oct. 7." Bloggers had found that no charges were posted to the mail meter by the county elections office the week ballots were mailed—but federal law permits transfer of the ballots at no charge.

Likewise, Republicans have sought ballots submitted under the names of the deceased; verification showed that some voters signed the wrong line in the poll book, inadvertently voting as deceased parents or siblings instead of themselves. Another voter, Charlette Holmgren, died days before her absentee ballot arrived in the mail; her husband followed her wish and cast her vote on her behalf—against Gregoire. Bob Holmgren told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "[T]hat day it was 10 votes—I thought about maybe calling. If it had gotten down to one vote, I honestly was going to call up and say you can cancel that one vote."

At press time, the Republicans and Democrats are facing off over whether state police should release a database of felons to the Republicans so they may check for felons who have not had their voting rights restored in the roles.

Meanwhile, in Washington, DC and in Ohio, the presidential election results were being contested. Four years ago, 39 members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) stood up at the joint congressional session to challenge the election based on blatantly racist disenfranchisement and were summarily dismissed because not one senator would stand with them to dispute certification of the electoral ballots. This year, they had a Senator, Barbara Boxer of California. Unlike in Washington State, where the individuals who cast ballots unlawfully most likely believed they were in the right; unlike in Washington, where computer ballots were printed and recounted; and unlike in Washington, where poll workers are simply a bit slow, or a low on pens, not on voting machines in predominately black and poor neighborhoods; there appeared to be true election fraud and voter disenfranchisement going on in Ohio, New Mexico, and elsewhere that was not addressed. This January 6, the CBC stood with Barbara Boxer and forced two hours' debate over the issue.

While only a single Senator signed the petition, others including Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama stood up to commend the protest and call on our government to stand not only as a machine of war creating democracy, but also as an example of democracy. As Clinton said, our "moral authority" is in danger when we support re-voting in the Ukraine but refuse to analyze problems within our own states.

The majority voted to certify Ohio's (and all other states') electoral ballots, and the following week, lawsuits in Ohio challenging the presidential election results there were dropped. Washington State Republican congress members also unsuccessfully attempted to delay certification of the gubernatorial election at their joint

session on January 11, to postpone inauguration of Gregoire until after the courts have considered the challenge. And on January 12, 2005, she was sworn in as Washington's 22nd governor.

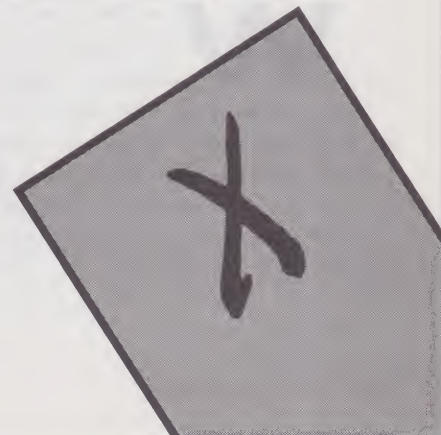
Yet a state recount is ongoing in New Mexico and the process continues in the courts in Washington State. Secretary of State Sam Reed is both proposing election reform and facing a possible recall vote; his election reforms include moving the primary up from September to June, to allow time to create the ballots for the General Election; moving up the absentee ballot postmark deadline from election day to the Friday prior; and requiring that counties tabulate every valid ballot in their possession on election night. In Washington, these changes may have precluded the present three-ring circus, though it's hard to say what difference it would have made to Liza Case's vote; in Ohio, it is unlikely these reforms would prevent the disenfranchisement of people of color at all.

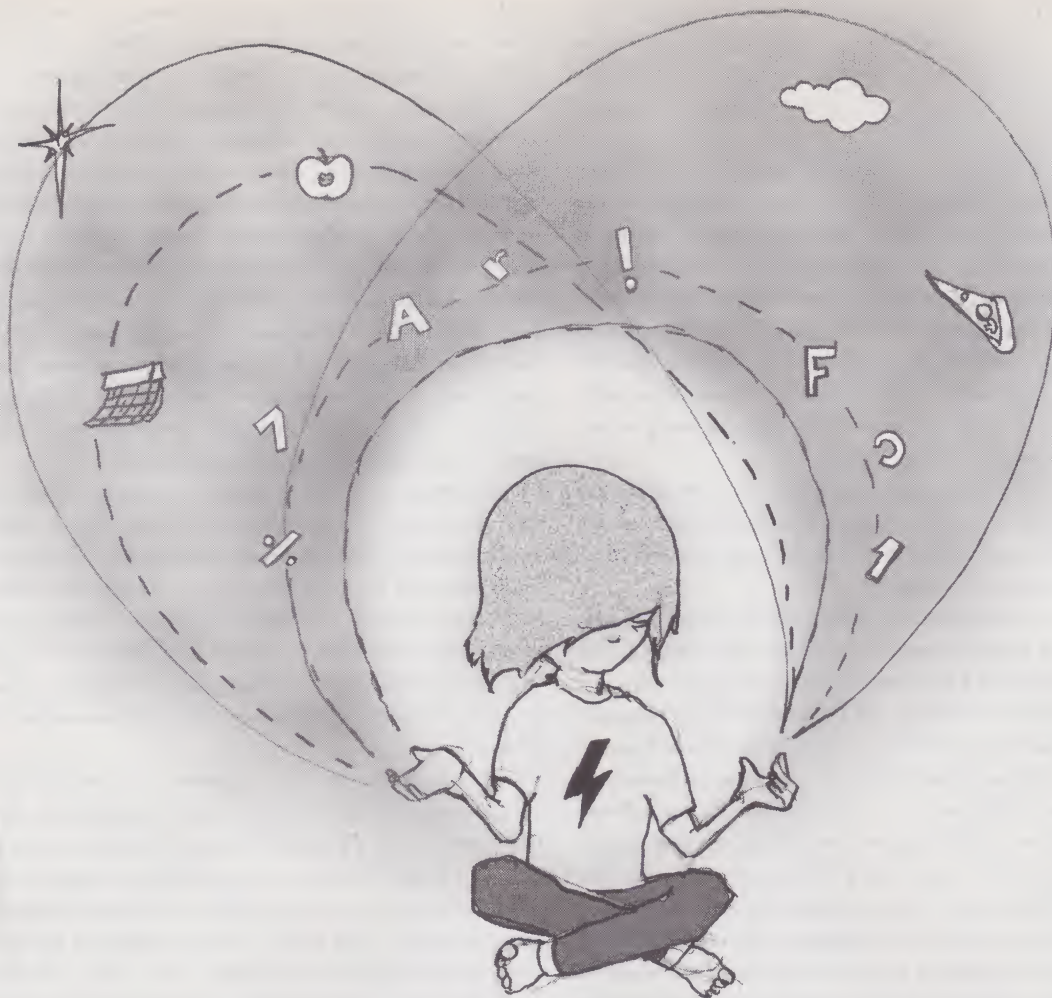
Imagine for a moment that in 2000, votes were counted and recounted, that questions could have been asked about access to the polls and seriously considered, not pacified with the Help America Vote Act that clearly did not deal adequately with race-based disenfranchisement. January 2001 might have arrived with a different president—but this is only wishful thinking. Unfortunately, it is also wishful thinking that Congress would spend time talking about the problems evident in our own democracy.

But imagine, just for a moment, that we had leaders willing to consider that our election didn't go perfectly smoothly, and that it was really a pretty close race. Imagine that a person concerned with the overall success of the government and society he was leading were in charge. What would such a leader say? Maybe something like, "We need to set an ambitious agenda, but at the same time, we need to be honest." Or, "You can divide us into 'red' and 'blue' counties by how we vote, but we aren't divided on issues that all of us must deal with," as Governor Gregoire has said. Gregoire's ambitious agenda includes health care for all children in Washington State by 2010. It includes pay raises for teachers, reduction of bureaucracy throughout the state, and help for small businesses.

Imagine, now, that Bush were such a leader; that he planned to mend fences and lead a unified Congress in the next four years. But Bush prefers to speak of how he'll spend his political capital; the most one can hope is that the willingness of Senator Boxer to sign this time, and the willingness of high-profile Democratic Senators to speak is a sign of hours of argument on the Senate floor to come. Two hours was a start; may the next four years be filled with debates and conversations about democracy in America as it has been the past two months—and may the bloggers continue to push the envelope, ask the questions, and subvert the inertia of the mass media. ©

At press time, the Republicans and Democrats are facing off over whether state police should release a database of felons to the Republicans so they may check for felons who have not had their voting rights restored in the roles.





BY CATE LEVINSON
ILLUSTRATION BY NADINE NAKANISHI

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

With its innovative approach of educating both the mind and the body of its students, the Namaste Charter School is teaching kids the joy of clean living on Chicago's South Side.

When the students of the Namaste Charter School on Chicago's South Side go to PE, they don't play dodgeball, and they don't play kickball: They do yoga. They don't learn their ABCs sitting at their desks copying the letters off the blackboard. They get up out of their chairs and use their bodies to make the shape of each letter. And when they get nervous before a test, they know how to use acupressure to alleviate the stress so they can focus on the task at hand.

These lessons make up the Namaste School's not-so typical mission: "to educate children from the inside out." Founder and Development Coordinator Allison Slade's says the best way to help kids reach a higher level of achievement is to nourish and "stimulate both the mind *and* body of each student."

Slade has taught in a variety of different settings—the inner city in Houston, and public schools in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs, but she "never found a place that adequate-

ly supported children, teachers, and parents in the process of achieving at high levels," she says. She wanted to create a public school environment with that goal in mind.

So when the Chicago Public School Board announced Renaissance 2010, a controversial plan to shut down 60 of Chicago's suffering public schools and open 100 smaller charter and contract schools in their place, Slade got to work on a proposal. Within a year the charter was complete, and Namaste was one of two schools that were approved to open in September 2004.

According to Slade, the idea behind Namaste is that any child can achieve at higher levels when they learn to make positive decisions about exercise and nutrition. From the healthy breakfasts they eat when they arrive in the morning to the 60 minutes of PE they do at the end of each school day, the 90 first graders who make up the Namaste school's inaugural class learn "about making healthy choices." Although they've only finished their first quarter, Slade has seen improvements. "There's a major difference in the way kids relate to each other and the way they relate to their teachers," she says.

Unlike most schools, Slade believes the PE teacher at Namaste is at the foundation of the school's mission. Slade hired a certified dance therapist to teach PE and she works with both students and teachers in a variety of non-competitive disciplines: yoga, pilates, and games that build character and self-esteem.

Slade and her colleagues draw from a variety of programs developed by educators who believe in taking a holistic approach in primary education. Yogakids—a program designed by Marsha Wenig—uses yoga and meditation techniques to teach kids coordination, relaxation, and focus in addition to building strength and flexibility. Another program called Reading in Motion, teaches basic reading skills through music and dance in order to help kids understand the organic connection between reading and art. And some of the most effective learning tools that the Namaste students have are from a program called Brain Gym, an educational kinesiology program designed to enhance learning through a specific set of movements which target acupressure points to improve cognitive functioning.

Barbara Bednarz is a Brain Gym teacher and consultant who taught in Chicago Public schools for nearly 30 years. She was introduced to the concept when she attended a beginner's seminar in the mid-'90s. She immediately started using the techniques in her classes and found they had a dramatic effect on student performance. "In high school," she recalls, "class time is really limited, but I found I got more accomplished when the students were calm and focused, so it was a great investment of time."

According to Bednarz, "the movement paradoxically both activates and relaxes the brain, which is the state needed for optimal learning. The movements target the three main areas of the brain and also target specific functions within each area. It works physiologically by strengthening nerve networks in the brain, getting them myelinated, and moving electrical activity quickly and efficiently. So when you use it, you're switching on and accessing all parts of the brain."

Bednarz says the technique she teaches work for everyone because they're "not a magic pill," they're a tool. "Children who know

and use them stay centered, relaxed, and have electrical activity in the frontal lobes of their brains—which is where rational thinking takes place—so they will be making better choices. They will be operating out of choice and not out of survival reflexes or emotions."

Slade says the kids at Namaste have already begun to use these techniques on their own. "If the kids are feeling nervous during a test, they'll stop and do their 'brain buttons,' or if they need to wake up they'll do a 'cross crawl.' They're learning to make these choices already."

At the Namaste School every teacher is trained to use all of these disciplines in the classroom. Slade believes it's essential that "everyone uses the same language throughout the school, everyone knows what it means when they talk about 'space bubbles' and the 'pathways in which people move'" This ensures that each teacher is providing a seamless transition for the children throughout the day, and teaches them that they can apply the skills they learn one class to every other class they take. "Using common language and talking honestly about the things that are important here and why, does a lot for the kids; they understand it."

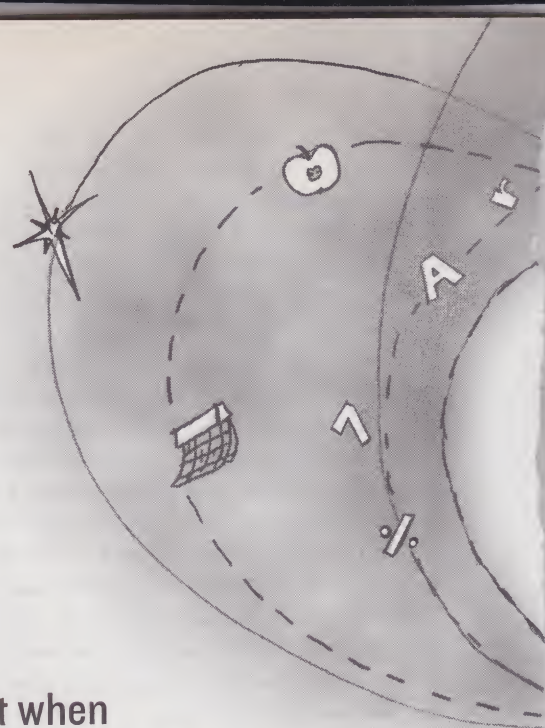
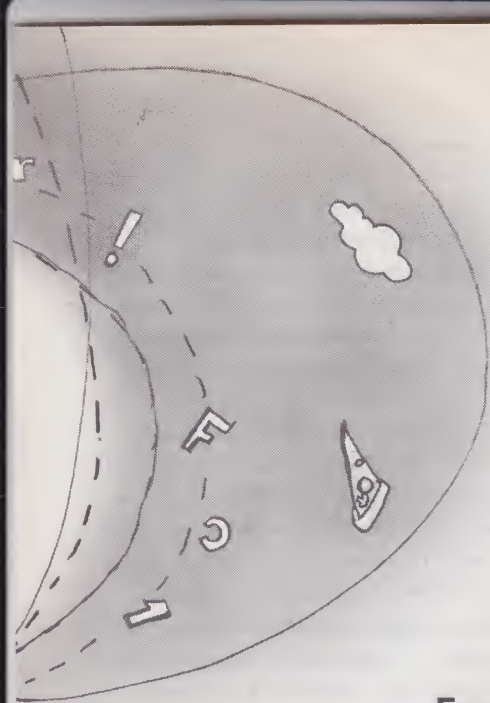
Slade says the students are beginning to integrate these concepts into their lives outside the classroom as well. "It's amazing," she says, "You'll see people on the playground, and if one kid bumps into another, or if someone is getting too close to someone else, they'll say, 'You're in my space, can you please move out of my space,' instead of punching each other, saying 'move!' or getting into a fight. You can really see how they're internalizing a lot of these lessons."

The benefits to using activity and movement when teaching young children are limitless, says Slade. "Kids never want to sit still, so forcing them doesn't work. So the kids at our school learn to calm down in PE. If they learn that calming down is moving too—just like when they learn that they can form the letters of the alphabet with their bodies—they'll think it's fun."

But in order to make sure the learning doesn't end when the children go home, Slade believes that it's crucial to not only communicate with parents, but to involve them in their children's daily routine away from home. Namaste offers variety of different programs for parents, says Slade, "because we feel that with our mission of health, physical fitness and nutrition it's really important to make sure the parents are learning along with their kids. After all, it's not the kids who are going to the grocery store to buy their own food."

Melissa Leudtke of the Nutritional Resource Foundation says it's important that kids learn the benefits of nutritional eating habits both at school and at home, "If parents are telling their children to eat healthy but then the children get to school and there is nothing but junk food to eat, there is not going to be a very strong message in their minds to eat healthy as they get older. If healthy eating habits are instilled in children both at home and at school, they are more likely to choose healthy foods for the rest of their lives."

The Namaste Charter School addresses this issue with a program they call the Friday Family Breakfast program, where parents are invited to an early morning breakfast at the school, followed by a lecture series that focuses on health and nutrition. This year the topics have covered subjects such as how to read nutritional labels, which



From the healthy breakfasts they eat when they arrive in the morning to the 60 minutes of PE they do at the end of each school day, the 90 first graders who make up the Namaste school's inaugural class learn "about making healthy choices."

nutrients are in different vegetables, and how to ensure that their kids are getting to vital nutrients they need to grow. In preparation for the winter, Slade invited a personal trainer to come in to teach the parents exercises they can do with their kids when they're cooped up because of the weather.

At a time when there is so much new information aimed at both parents and children, it's crucial to provide resources and a supportive environment for parents. Drawing parents into the school, and teaching them in conjunction with their children, ensures that the Namaste School way of life is an integral part of their lives. To reinforce this, Namaste has opened a parent's center, where they offer workshops, books and magazines for parents to learn more about their child's education.

Getting parents involved in their child's education is key, says Slade, but she thinks the best way to improve the way children integrate their home life and school life is to do away with what many believe is an essential part of childhood: the three-month summer. "There's a lot of research that shows what some call the 'brain drain'," says Slade, "which means that kids regress on an average of a half year of progress during the summer."

Slade proposed that the best way to prevent this regression was to have the children in school year round. Each quarter at Namaste school is three months long after which the students and teachers have one month off. During this time the teachers are required to spend three days attending a seminar for professional development. As for the students, Namaste provides a free two-week art program so they have something to do during their time off.

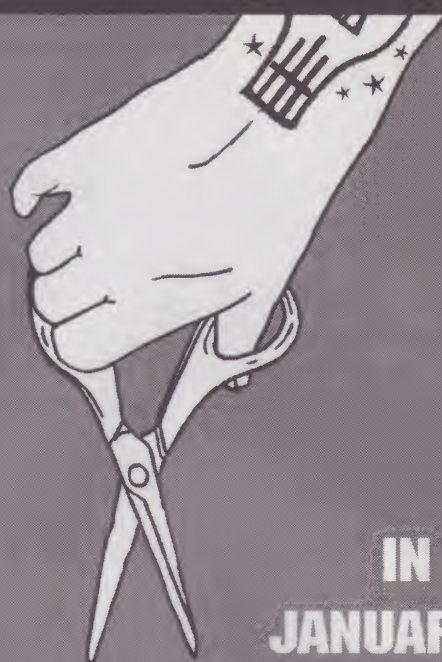
With so many new ideas being implemented at Namaste, it's easy to

forget that it's a free, public school. But Slade believes the charter school is the perfect format for developing new ideas in early childhood education. "The kids are chosen by a lottery and it's free for students to attend. We're independent, but we're also a public school. Our charter included all of these ideas in it. They approved us based on the fact that we were going to make all of these ideas happen, pilot them for the school system, and promote ways that traditional schools could implement them as well."

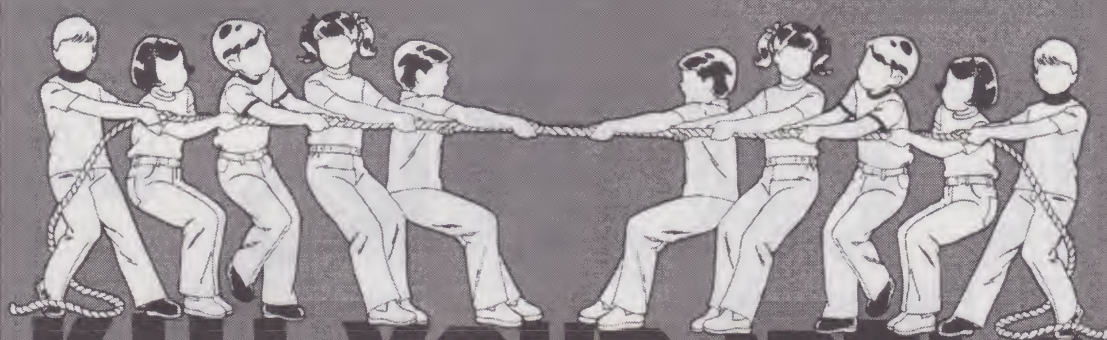
Bringing these innovations to more of Chicago's traditional public schools, however, is still a long way off. Many parents are concerned the Renaissance 2010 plan is doing more harm than good. Neighborhoods in the Mid-South area, where nearly 90 percent of the city's low-income student attend school, are losing a number of their elementary schools to the CPS closings.

Beginning in September 2005, between six and 20 schools will be established each year as part of the plan. The new schools will be given five years to meet their expected requirements. If the schools do not meet expected academic goals within that time, they may be ordered to close. Many Mid-South students have been relocated once already, and will be relocated again in September 2006. Most parents don't want to gamble with their children's education by enrolling them in experimental programs—they want the quality of public school education to improve *right now*.

While the 90 students at the Namaste Charter School may be a tiny fraction of the more than 400,000 in the Chicago Public School system, for innovative teachers like Slade, it's a start in getting students the education they deserve. ©



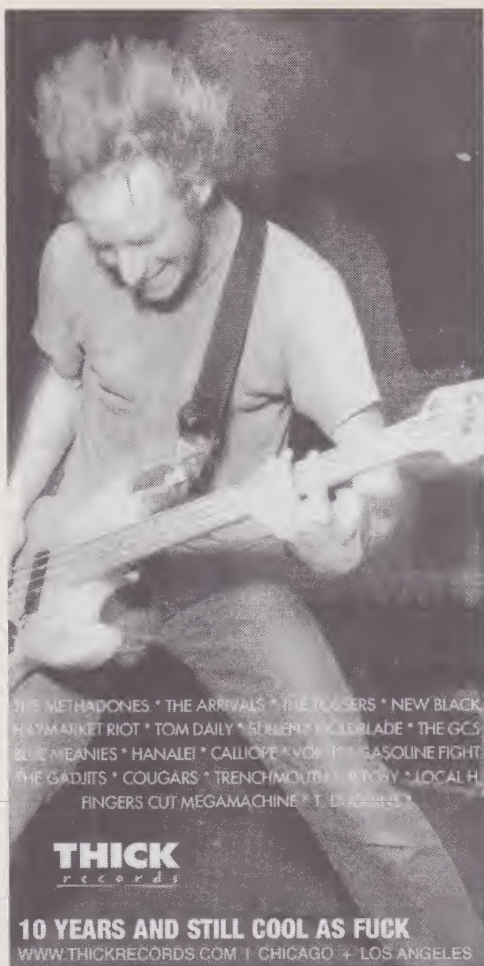
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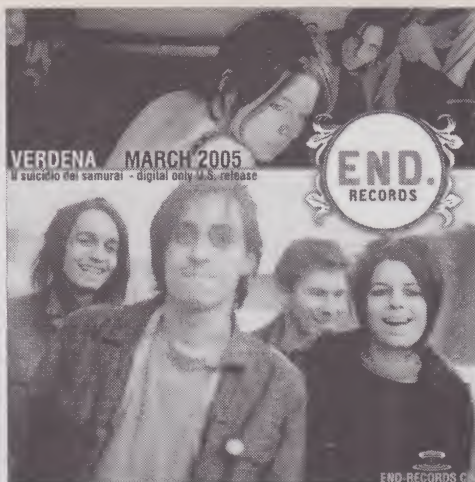
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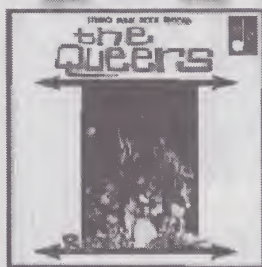
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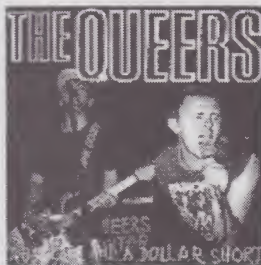
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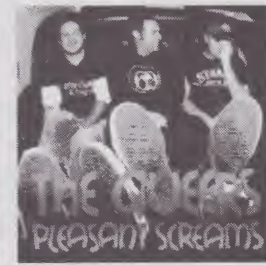
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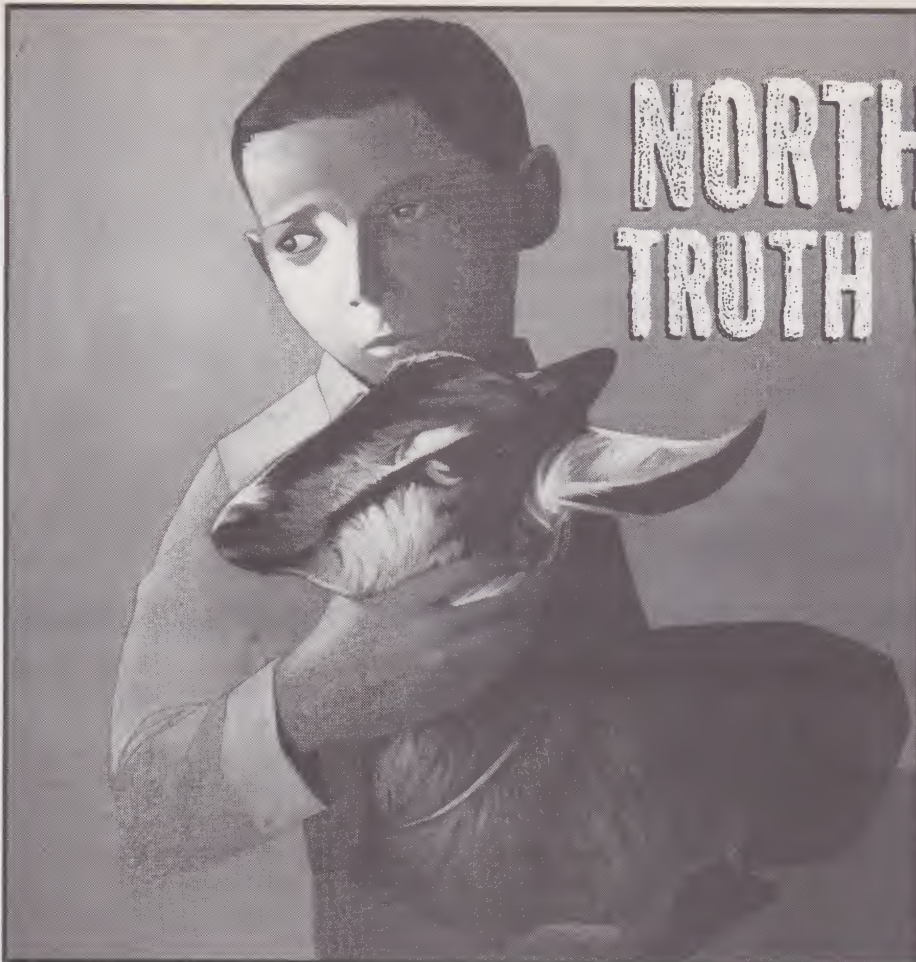
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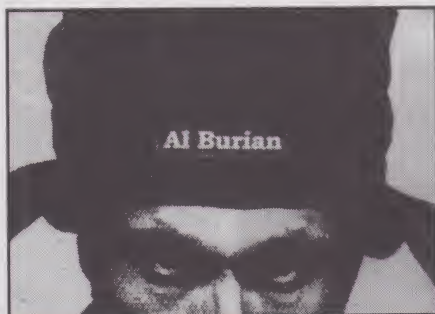


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A friend of Amine asked me about America," sang the band Swiz. "I told her to be scared, because, well, people

are dumb." Polls indicate that upwards of 97 percent of the population of Europe, if given the chance to vote in the US presidential elections, would have voted Bush out. Meanwhile, eligible American voters flock to the polls in record numbers to ratify the bureaucratic slip up of 2000 into an actual electoral mandate, demonstrating to the world that we are not a nation of mere simpletons, our attention spans too easily diverted to maintain focus for the arduous process of re-counting ballots. No, this time America has spoken. The commander in chief of the most powerful nation on earth, who, according to one traumatized ex-aide, is often to be found lying in a fetal position in front of his desk in the oval office, shaking and twitching as he prays for guidance from his angry old testament-style god—no, I'm not kidding; this is the sort of factoid that lodges itself firmly in the imagination of the populaces living in our nuclear shadow but doesn't seem to factor into exit polls in Nebraska whatsoever. But just visualize it for a minute. *Lying in a fetal position, twitching and praying for guidance.* America gives this sort of behavior the rubber stamp of approval, and Europeans begin to wonder: are Americans really just dumb as hell?

It's an ominous rumble, a tectonic shift in the conversational precept. I have spent the month leading up to the election in Berlin, trying to avoid the depressing details. Now, the day after the election, the Germans have begun to eye me cautiously, and I want to explain to them that it has nothing to do with me, that I didn't watch the debates and that my absentee ballot never showed up. It's not my fault, man! But the Germans aren't so sure. Slowly but perceptibly, anti-Bush sentiment is becoming a more general

anti-American sentiment, not of the xenophobic variety, but more along the lines of the kind of pitying dislike you might feel for a neighbor who sits on his porch huffing gas all day. The day after the election, people's interest in me as an American has shifted, from the political—who do you think will win, what do you think of the platforms—to the sociological: what is wrong with you people? Are you really that stupid? Or are you all just plain old evil?

Given the choice between evil and stupid, I'll be optimistic about it and go with stupid.

...

The French really are nice people. This reality hit painfully home to me on a recent visit there, where I attended a punk show and was impressed by the remarkable familiarity of the indigenous sub-culturals have with my fanzine, specifically one certain page, one scandalous sentence: page two, issue number six, there it is, in black and white flash-fried Xerox toner, mass produced and disseminated by the force of my own irrational will: *I've never liked the French.*

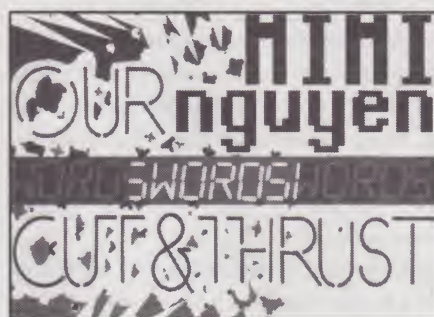
"Well, it's not that I ... I mean, I don't mean to say that I don't ..." I stammer at the invariably non-confrontational request for an explanation. But how can you rationalize your way out of *I've never liked the French*? There it is, my opinion, incontestable, name and address attached. Al Burian, internationalist and purveyor of peace and global harmony, has been "caught on tape" (as Tony Lazzara would put it) expressing anti-francophile sentiments.

My apologies, French people! It was an ill-considered sentence, written in a moment of fury years ago, aboard an Air France flight where I was having difficulty getting a second serving of salted nuts. At the time I knew no French people personally, and certainly never imagined that I would be mingling with such people at rock concerts, let alone that they'd have access to my ill-considered photocopies.

Like most Americans, my main inroad to French culture or civilization generally has been via the medium of Steve Martin's *Wild and Crazy Guy* comedy album. And, as in my case, I doubt that Steve Martin meant to contribute to the cannon of Franco-American hostility when he sneered his immortal indictment, "it's like those

French have a different word for *everything*." But the fact is that insensitive statements such as these lead to a culture of permissiveness, where thousands of young people such as myself have felt validated in thinking that the French are weird and that their language sounds funny.

When I objectively examine the recent history of Franco-American hostility, though, I find myself siding with the French on almost all the issues. In the 1980's, the French earned the wrath of the American government and associated populace when they refused to allow US fighter planes to traverse their air-space en route to bombing Libya. Although it was more of a symbolic inconvenience than an actual effective curtailing of the military mission, Americans saw it as a chicken-hearted move on the part of the frog-leg eating Franks. And when the French weren't being pacifists, they were acting slut-tish: In the 1990s, as Bill Clinton faced outrage, impeachment and scandal following the revelations of a brief tryst with Monica Lewinsky, French Prime Minister Francois Mitterand was publicly attending the funeral of his life-long mistress, without any apparent social condemnation at all. This was seen by Americans as boastful, as if the French head of state felt the need to make it clear on a public stage that he got more action than the leader of the most powerful nation on earth. And now, in 2003, the French refusal to join the coalition of those willing to decimate Iraq has re-opened the old wounds, leading to a renewed vigor and intensity in the American tradition of politically motivated fast food re-naming. As in World War I, when the frank and hamburgers were deGermanized as the "hot dog" and "victory sandwich" (victory sandwich! For some reason that never caught the public imagination in the way that hot dog did), xenophobic attitudes permeate popular culture, become ingrained, manifest themselves in the ethnic caricatures of Peter Sellers' Inspector Clouseau, the Meatmen song "French people suck," or even my own unfortunate photocopied outburst. It is time to break the cycle of hatred. I apologize to you, French people, on behalf of my countrymen and for my own contributions to besmirching your fine nationality. Keep up the good work! Viva Le France!



It seems a fitting coincidence that Ronald Reagan's death served to bookend the 12 years comprising my Berkeley biog-

raphy as a punk rocker (and as a punk-rock expatriate), spanning the Bay in a circuitous route through BART tunnels, warehouses and a life otherwise built underground. In the midst of revelations of prisoner abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, and disappearing (and fictional) justifications for unilateral war, it seemed to me that the Ronald Reagan memorial became a national pastime. It also became a reprieve from the political, as the triumphalist deification of Ronald Reagan allowed embattled Americans—beset by death tolls and fierce debates—to feel good about their country again. During the weeks following his passing, journalists and politicians across the Congressional aisle offered radiant portrayals of Reagan as both a giant of American superiority (the man who "ended" the Cold War) and a grandfatherly figure (a kindly eater of Jelly Bellies) guided, occasionally mistakenly but never maliciously, by his good intentions. Even the weathermen presumed to divine that god would weep the day Reagan was buried.

Because of this I thanked punk rock on the day Ronald Reagan died. Immediately graffiti appeared all over the city with a discernable sneer, "Punk's not dead, but Reagan is." These anonymous messages, scrawled across concrete, brick, and wood, felt like welcome blasphemy in the midst of a national funereal frenzy. *Maximumrocknroll* had been planning for the occasion for years. On the afternoon of Reagan's passing, a handful of volunteers hastily assembled a radio show of nothing but anti-Reagan songs, including Reagan Youth's "We are Reagan Youth, *seig heil!*," The Crucifucks' "Hinckley Had a Vision," and The Minutemen's "If Reagan played disco he'd shoot it to shit / You can't disco in jack boots." Reverberating over the airwaves of a neighborhood pirate fre-

quency and across the hillsides of San Francisco, it was a play list appropriate to the task of recording the effects and impressions of a notorious life in power.

Maximumrocknroll had held a meeting at the start of George W. Bush's presidency to prepare for the inevitability of Reagan's passing, making lists of issues to address, planning covers to counter the likelihood of fawning tributes at the magazine rack. Filled with Reagan Ranch calendars (all featuring a still-robust Reagan in his cowboy gear), old anti-Reagan flyers and yellowing newspaper clippings, a cardboard box labeled "Reagan" sat gathering dust above the retired waxing machine in the office corner. A few days after his death, a ragtag group of volunteers hastily assembled to discuss features and deadlines for the Reagan counter memorial issue (possible covers included the slogan, "Punks: I, Reagan: O"). Poring through three years' worth of our collected materials, I found an old friend's four-page outline for a survey of Reagan's presidency, which he had prepared at my nagging request three years past. It was jarring, being reminded of him, of Charles, in this manner and on this occasion—Charles, whom I hadn't spoken to since the attacks on the Twin Towers, who'd once been a punk rocker but had since become a patriot.

In the early 1990s, Charles and I were among the hordes of black-clad teenagers drawn to the East Bay, and the city, on the strength of their reputations as the centers of punk rock, and it's here that so many of us found (and fought) each other. Charles was from a small town in Mississippi, the son of a college economics professor surrounded by Confederate nostalgists and Southern Baptists, so of course he tore up Bibles, wore black eyeliner and scandalous punk T-shirts, destroyed a public memorial to a Southern general and published a fanzine with the optimistic name *Assault (With Intent to Free)*. I was a disaffected, punk-rock teenager in suburban San Diego when the first Persian Gulf conflict erupted. Feeling desperate and disorderly, I would sprawl across the flowered comforter of my white four-poster bed, staring at blurred photographs of punk rockers rioting against the war, the romantic pin-ups of my teenaged dreaming. With fingers blackened by newsprint, I traced the lines of their arms swinging, caught in mid-motion, their faces hidden behind bandanas and hooded jackets. Both Berkeley undergraduates and Epicenter Zone volunteers (EZ was a not-for-profit punk rock record store in the City), Charles and I became fast friends on this foundation of punk rock and politics. Late one night as we sat talking and listening to records, he told me that he would be grateful to punk forever for saving his life. It was a grand declaration delivered with some embarrassment (we were often surrounded by persons who scoffed at any sentiment not uttered with cynicism). But at the time, a 17-year-old me felt the same.

Of course, I know better now than to fall for the romance of revolution, and it's been a long time since punk rock failed so miserably to fulfill such hopes with its dumb side, its dark side, its dangerously reactionary side. But I wouldn't deny what punk rock has made of me, even as an expatriate, and there's still a heart-stirring, a promise that flirts with me the way I sometimes like

to be flirted with—with dirty, sprawling, mad-eyed intensity, and a permanent snarl. For Charles, however, punk rock proved to be something different—an embarrassment, though partially of his own making, of political extremities. Having once designed himself as the ultimate punk rocker and "militant vegan," he then threw himself a different role, another persona, as a "normal" law student. Finally, in the last years of our acquaintance, we argued constantly. He had certain revisionist tendencies, rewriting his personal history to renounce punk and, it seemed to me, what it had made of us. He wanted to leave the subterranean routes of the City, outlined in murals and graffiti scrawls and set to a cacophonous soundtrack, for the distilled stratosphere of its high society. In this immaculate conception, Charles gave birth to himself as a high-powered lawyer (no more talk about working immigration cases) with sophisticated tastes (Prada suits two-hundred-dollar dinners at the "best" restaurants) and no particular past at all (and certainly not one involving eyeliner). For some reason this irritated me—not because I had anything against either expensive fashion or food, but because it seemed to be an amnesiac effort at dis-remembering how we both arrived at the historical present. So I took special delight in reminding him of the late nights we spent listening to The Ex in the dark, falling asleep on the ratty (possibly flea-infested) couches at Epicenter, and wandering the City during the three a.m. lull, political slogans spray-painted in the wake of our paths. He accepted these admonishments with some embarrassment, muttering half-jokingly about temporary phases and juvenile delinquency. Nonetheless he eventually threw away everything he once owned (his beautiful, if impersonal, apartment seemed to have bought from a catalog or magazine clipping), including his leftist politics. After 9/11 all our arguments turned into silences. He became an avid supporter of the amorphous war on terror, a flag-waver and a "love it or leave it" sloganeer, and through some unspoken agreement—our last such agreement—we ended our stilted communications.

The outline I had found in *Maximum's* stockpile of Reagan-ready materials provoked a sense of loss in me, an alternative mourning for someone who had effectively "died" in his self-induced transformation from punk to patriot. Charles was once an encyclopedia for the abuses of the Reagan administrations, especially with regard to its foreign policies and support for authoritarian regimes; I had no doubt that he tossed off this outline, at my request, without need for references or reminders. I wondered then, did his punk past stir secret, seditious feelings upon hearing of Reagan's death? Or have those particular politics, like punk, been too long buried like corpses in graves? And did his revisionism match the hagiography in the weeks following, stretching to encompass and deny El Salvadoran death squads, the Contras, homelessness, union-busting and AIDS silence?

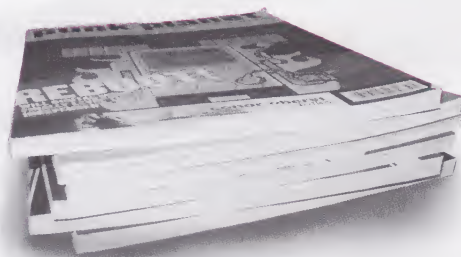
It is with Charles in mind—Charles and his unwillingness to confront the contradictions or conflicts of his personal history—that I thanked punk rock for once saving my life.

In a collection called *Materializing Democracy*, political theorist

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especially after the crisis-event condensed as "9/11"—seems to suggest that Americans are discomforted by democratic contest. Instead the political good life is imagined to reside in ceding power to the presidential representative who promises to "protect" us from contact with democracy, a conditional belonging under which dissent is construed as an intrusion upon his political order and a danger to the social good.

And so, in a political climate in which *feeling* differently is tantamount to treason, the echo of punk rock encouraged me to feel treasonous. It might be particular to those of us who grew up under Reagan's legacies of social hysteria and brutal discipline (disguised as a moral majority and tough love), but punk rock did pose a challenge, for at least a while, to the short-circuiting of the civic imagination. Because punk rock can address the intimate levels of consciousness at which identification with or against authority was lived and felt (whether manifest as a boy in eyeliner in

Star Wars and homelessness, chatting about politics but also our co-ops, partners, and graduate dissertations. One cowboy-hatted Reagan passed out ketchup packets to confused (and then amused) spectators. One young woman received her ration of vegetables enthusiastically; she told us that she had just moved to San Francisco, and our performance of counter memory was a guarantee for this decision. Older gay men watched as we walked past, tears in their eyes and fists raised in salute. And a middle-aged black woman took a flyer from me and declared out loud, to no one in particular, "I wondered when something was going to happen! And it's about time! I almost thought I wasn't in San Francisco anymore!"

I moved a month later, taking a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship, and a position as a visiting assistant professor, in the Midwest. But in those last summer months before leaving, it seemed as if all those things that brought me here—including my romance with riots and revolution—were suddenly being amended with sur-

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d at the anti-war riot), intimate levels of conspiracy are lived and felt. Mourning that contemptful that punk rock and seditious feelings, democracy.

pecially for those of us in America, it seemed appropriate on our part. On September 11, we came in twos and threes, in our blue suits and red ties, a punk rock caucus that began as one person's own accounting of the final funeral procession of our makeshift icons and Gordon's red silk tie dyed in gold thread, "STAR WARS" burned into the fabric. Reading, "Newsflash! A Reagan administration, no lie.) Someone had been in office; it also read, 'You touched us in ways that were dapper in my own fitting my fellow Reagans' ("no chanting" was a condition to comply), I felt a brief moment to remember Reagan but also what he made for us.

He walked the Mission with refugees from US-Castro (past an AIDS clinic) and for Reagan's silence and the squads and PATCO,

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Maximumrocknroll h

Bush's presidency to p ing, making lists of is the likelihood of faw with Reagan Ranch c in his cowboy gear), paper clippings, a ca dust above the retired days after his death, a to discuss features an rial issue (possible co o"). Poring through t I found an old friend presidency, which he years past. It was jarr this manner and on t to since the attacks o rocker but had since i

In the early 1990 black-clad teenagers strength of their rep here that so many of from a small town in M fessor surrounded by tists, so of course he dalous punk T-shirts general and published Intent to Free). I was a dis Diego when the first I ate and disorderly, I v my white four-poster rockers rioting agains dreaming. With finge

their arms swinging, caught in mid-motion, their faces hidden behind bandanas and hooded jackets. Both Berkeley undergraduates and Epicenter Zone volunteers (EZ was a not-for-profit punk rock record store in the City), Charles and I became fast friends on this foundation of punk rock and politics. Late one night as we sat talking and listening to records, he told me that he would be grateful to punk forever for saving his life. It was a grand declaration delivered with some embarrassment (we were often surrounded by persons who scoffed at any sentiment not uttered with cynicism). But at the time, a 17-year-old me felt the same.

Of course, I know better now than to fall for the romance of revolution, and it's been a long time since punk rock failed so miserably to fulfill such hopes with its dumb side, its dark side, its dangerously reactionary side. But I wouldn't deny what punk rock has made of me, even as an expatriate, and there's still a heart-stirring, a promise that flirts with me the way I sometimes like

mourning for someone who had effectively "died" in his self-induced transformation from punk to patriot. Charles was once an encyclopedia for the abuses of the Reagan administrations, especially with regard to its foreign policies and support for authoritarian regimes; I had no doubt that he tossed off this outline, at my request, without need for references or reminders. I wondered then, did his punk past stir secret, seditious feelings upon hearing of Reagan's death? Or have those particular politics, like punk, been too long buried like corpses in graves? And did his revisionism match the hagiography in the weeks following, stretching to encompass and deny El Salvadoran death squads, the Contras, homelessness, union-busting and AIDS silence?

It is with Charles in mind—Charles and his unwillingness to confront the contradictions or conflicts of his personal history—that I thanked punk rock for once saving my life.

In a collection called *Materializing Democracy*, political theorist

Dana Nelson wrote, "It is a widely regarded patriotic fact that the President of the United States 'stands for' US democracy, and in particular its national unity. But we should interrogate the democratic value of this national common sense." With Ronald Reagan's passing, "mourning in America" organized national unity as a forcibly consensual space emptied of democratic contestation. A public patchwork of familial metaphors emerged to shape a sentimental model of infantile citizenship, indulging Reagan's supposedly grandfatherly image in order to command, on his behalf, our final respect. (Much in the manner in which wayward children are scolded, "But he was your grandfather! Be *polite* and give him his due!") But this discourse of mourning also demanded the sacralization of the office—as if the presidency were an abstraction outside of history or politics—at the expense of the historical memory of Reagan's actions while in the seat of power. Even as the hagiographic tenor of most eulogies appealed to a *moral* authority assumed to transcend *all* ideological partisanship or political stances, they failed to acknowledge that Reagan's presidency was entirely driven by ideology. His was a presidency crucially informed by a paranoid anticommunism, crafting foreign policies that resulted in death and destruction throughout Central America and the Middle East, and whose claim to a moral high ground also shaped public acts of intimate violence, most spectacularly in its deliberate neglect of the AIDS epidemic.

Running counter to democratic process, this vague articulation of a sacred body (belonging to the President) as the embodiment of democracy takes the form of an antidemocratic move that discourages dialogue or debate about the political implications not only of Reagan's administration, but *also the nature of democracy being conceptualized here*. Mystifying the political through recourse to nonpolitical categories of national collectivity, the memorialization of Ronald Reagan is an important instance of how contemporary national discourse privileges a conception of politics that reduces it to expressions of unity and love of country. While democracy ostensibly remains the reason that America is imagined as an exemplar of the "free world," recent popular discourse—especially after the crisis-event condensed as "9/11"—seems to suggest that Americans are discomforted by democratic contest. Instead the political good life is imagined to reside in ceding power to the presidential representative who promises to "protect" us from contact with democracy, a conditional belonging under which dissent is construed as an intrusion upon his political order and a danger to the social good.

And so, in a political climate in which *feeling differently* is tantamount to treason, the echo of punk rock encouraged me to feel treasonous. It might be particular to those of us who grew up under Reagan's legacies of social hysteria and brutal discipline (disguised as a moral majority and tough love), but punk rock did pose a challenge, for at least a while, to the short-circuiting of the civic imagination. Because punk rock can address the intimate levels of consciousness at which identification with or against authority was lived and felt (whether manifest as a boy in eyeliner in

a Southern small town or as the brick in hand at the anti-war riot), it also allowed some of us to interrogate the intimate levels of consciousness at which nationalism and democracy are lived and felt. Against an obligatory mode of presidential mourning that constrained and blocked contestation, I am grateful that punk rock continues to fuel alternative narratives, and seditious feelings, about Ronald Reagan and the practice of democracy.

Because it was the end of an era, especially for those of us who'd found punk rock in Reagan's America, it seemed appropriate that there be some final farewell gesture on our part. On a beautiful Friday afternoon in the Mission, we came in twos and threes to meet in Dolores Park, dressed in our blue suits and red ties hastily assembled from thrift store racks, a punk rock caucus of ragged Reagans. A counter memorial that began as one person's wistful daydream, we gathered for our own accounting of the Reagan presidency on the same day of the final funeral procession that would straddle both coasts. Bearing our makeshift icons of his presidency, we each in turn admired Gordon's red silk tie with the small hammer and sickle embroidered in gold thread, Anna's black umbrella with the words "STAR WARS" burned into its shade, and Michael's hand-made sign reading, "Newsflash! Reagan dead! Polluting trees suspected!" (A Reagan administration official once blamed pollution on trees, no lie.) Someone had made small flyers listing Reagan's abuses in office; it also read, with equal parts sincerity and sarcasm, "You touched us in ways we didn't want to be touched." And, feeling dapper in my own fitted blue blazer and red striped tie, watching my fellow Reagans assemble themselves for our silent march ("no chanting" was a condition with which we all happily agreed to comply), I felt a brief pang of regret that Charles wasn't here, to remember Reagan but more to remember what good punk rock had made for us.

Thus arrayed, we strolled along the sidewalks of the Mission District (where so many Central American refugees from US-sponsored conflicts live) and through the Castro (past an AIDS memorial remembering the thousands dead for Reagan's silence and inaction) with our signs about death squads and PATCO, Star Wars and homelessness, chatting about politics but also our co-ops, partners, and graduate dissertations. One cowboy-hatted Reagan passed out ketchup packets to confused (and then amused) spectators. One young woman received her ration of vegetables enthusiastically; she told us that she had just moved to San Francisco, and our performance of counter memory was a guarantee for this decision. Older gay men watched as we walked past, tears in their eyes and fists raised in salute. And a middle-aged black woman took a flyer from me and declared out loud, to no one in particular, "I wondered when something was going to happen! And it's about time! I almost thought I wasn't in San Francisco anymore!"

I moved a month later, taking a two-year postdoctoral research fellowship, and a position as a visiting assistant professor, in the Midwest. But in those last summer months before leaving, it seemed as if all those things that brought me here—including my romance with riots and revolution—were suddenly being amended with sur-

prise resolutions and footnote denouements. (In one instance, I discovered that an old Epicenter crush and friend had been one of the brick-hurling pin-ups of my teenaged daydreaming.) So it seems fitting that among my goodbye gestures to the city, the Reagan counter memorial included both obscenities (a "fuck you" accompanied by a raised fist) and a love letter to those things (punk rock and politics) that drew me here in the first place.

Thanks to everyone who participated in the Reagan counter memorial, and especially Joan for giving us the cue to do it, and to all those I miss desperately still living in the Bay Area. You can reach me (if you can find me under all this snow) at my usual e-mail address: slander13@mindspring.com, or send me "real" mail at 1122 Lane Hall, 204 S. State St., Ann Arbor, MI, 48109.



YESTERDAY

She woke up for a cigarette. She was ready to be up, she said. "I got all my nap out, I guess," and lit a Winston.

I was the only one awake. Still up? Still working? She asks. Yes. Deadline tomorrow.

I could not write while she is awake. Reviews and turning clever phrases about middling artists made all the more menial by the fact that I am constantly wondering if every conversation I have with her is going to be the last, arming every second with sickening urgency.

I get the little machine from the coffee table. "Arm please." She knows the drill, and I nurse it up good. I roll up the sleeve on her nightgown. "I don't think you are supposed to smoke while you do this," she laughs. I say "Well, let's just do it for fun then," and proceed to take her blood pressure while she takes a drag.

Yesterday this time, my sister and my mother and I arrived to central Florida in hopes that she had made it through the night. She, being Zola, my nana, age 86, mother of my mother. That previous morning, there was a call. It is very bad. Her blood pressure was above 300. Her body was failing, she could go any minute. We had to go right now. On a plane four hours later, followed by my sis and mother, all of us red eyed from running down the awful what ifs from our aisle seats.

Today she is fine, she is "fine." This morning, six a.m. dawn light rising through the Venetians, I woke up on the couch to her scoot-scooting past me with the aid of her new walker, her house shoes barely lifting off the floor. My mom was up already, and helped Nana into her remote-control lift chair. My mom sits at her feet, and holds her hand. "We thought you weren't gonna make it, Mom."—"Well, I'm a tough old broad, you know," she laughs.

I got up to hug her. Even standing, she is so small and delicate, I feel like I could hurt her by hugging her. Clocking four-foot-five, this year she only comes up to my sternum. Osteoporosis has shrunk her up. Her back fractured on its own this summer. She rolled over in bed wrong, and we learned anything could hurt

her. In the chair, she feebly tugs at her blanket. I pull it over her, and she pulls her knees up to her chest. When she does this, she looks like a baby. Or a walnut.

After a while, we put her down for a nap. Getting into the bed is tricky. I work like a construction crane, moving at glacier pace. She wraps her arms as tight around my neck, and I lower her down, my arms under her. Lower and scoot and rearrange. Pillow here. Leg there. She winces with pain. Scoot, lower, slower slow. I get her down into place, and she does not let go, she pulls me tighter, pulls me into her, until my head is on her shoulder, arms locked fiercely around me. She begins to cry. She is so happy to see us she says. I feel her pulse against my ear and her bird-bone fingers on my back.

She lets me up and I work on the Jenga-like arrangement of pillows she needs. It is not working right. I bring her my pillow that I brought from home. It's feather down. She tells me she has never had a feather pillow. I think this is about the most unjust thing I have ever heard. I tell her she can keep it if she likes. I lie down next to her and hold her hand, put my head up to her pewter curls. She moves to put her arm under my head. Sly, like we are on a date. She cries again. I cry too. My mom comes in. Mom cries too. Nana apologizes for making us all cry. She says it's only because she is happy. Of this, she is insistent, but there is a mortal trembling, the pulp of fear in her old blood. I am not crying because I am happy. I am crying because my heart is breaking.

She takes her pain medicine from my hand, one pill at a time, her thin fingers fumbling them out of the folds of my palm. My mom angles a cup and adjusts the straw for her and lifts it to her mother's mouth. It was the purest tenderness I have ever witnessed.

NEXT DAYS

Today, she is better. I was not around much today. I was off doing selfish things to tether me back to my silly young life, so I did not drift all the way into pathos and sadness. I am deeply ashamed of this. I am not this kind of brave. I only have this mean kid courage to muscle up, the kind of brave you need when breaking up fights or telling people to fuck off. I need *the other courage*, the premium grade, all-day all-night vigilant shit, of long beard yogis and nuns in movies, the kind that does not make you feel like your soul is a wet paper bag with a hole in it. I do not have the kind where I can accept sickness and stay right side up, at miracle peace with the inevitability of it all.

Most everyone I know who has died courted their death, paid for it in cash, even. Even my other grandma's husband. He bought his death in a lifetime of Dorals and highballs at an Elks Club bar. Doctors said "you will die" and he chose to keep going, he just stopped wearing his hearing aids so he did not have to hear someone bitch when he headed to the liquor cabinet. He knew what was approaching and swung the door wide to welcome it in. Others, they were just kids bent by adult weights, cocked by bad love or no love at all, and they got on with needles in their arms and shotguns in the mouth. Some were accidental. Most with specific intent.

All of those, those young—ready to dispense with this mortal coil, *you see it coming*. Maybe you witness with hope, or a scathing indifference to their junkie plight, maybe you just give up on them and turn them loose to the flames licking at them. All of that is a different kind of acceptance, a different shade of “seeing it coming” than where illness and old age takes you. Death and illness grip you in a separate way when they share your self-same DNA tract. The big lens of mortality, illuminating all the spots you missed, all the filthy corners inside, blown up big for easy examination in the gleaming light of corporeal failure of someone you love, someone who brushed your hair when you were tiny. All I could see in her death knell’d spotlight were all the times I was not here with her, fetching her lighter, tending her lawn, turning down her covers at night. All I see is wretched absence that was and wretched absence to come.

I am angry at it all. For all this creeping up on me like that.

AFTER DAYS

I went to sleep at five a.m. I stay up to work, and to be there if she needs anything, in case she decides on another Winston pre-dawn. Woke up at nine to my mom suggesting that I get up right because Nana was not so good today. Mom left to run errands. I make tea and head to the porch, to mind her with my sister. Five minutes later, Nana was almost folding in half in a stupor, had the chills, her pain medication working to extreme. We barely got her into the bed, six feet away—she fell fast asleep, her hand gripped on my fingers. We called mom. Mom panicked and called an ambulance, and raced home to meet it. Mom and I stood in the driveway crying. What if? What if?

The EMTs came in with their defibrillator and the gurney.

They kept calling her Zelma and talking to her in the overly loud voice that official people use on the aged and touching her with their purple latex gloves. ZELMA DO YOU WANT TO GO TO THE HOSPITAL? She woke up only to tell them “No, I am fine thank you.” WE’RE GOING TO TAKE YOUR BLOOD-PRESSURE OK ZELMA. It’s Zola, I tell them. Her blood pressure is fine; she is asleep, sawing logs, minutes later.

The EMTs suggest that it is just a cold.

I know it is not a cold and I want them and their loud talking out of my Nana’s room.

We know it is not a cold. It is cancer, says the doctor. They just cannot find it. All the symptoms. I think of this, and the other prognosis as useless specificity. Simply, she is going, and we must get ready for her going. I do not need the name of what is taking her, I just need to be with her, get her some Sprite and a pink bendy straw.

After the scare, after the EMT visit, which she does not remember, after the nap where I took out her teeth to squirrel away and wash them, she became very funny. Like haha funny. She woke up and yelled “Alright! Who stole my teeth?!” she told a rather tawdry joke, snapping on everyone in her flat, dry sense of humor. While my sister and I dressed her, she requested we get her a bra with “some uplift” and laughed hysterically at herself. Please, if I am alive at 86, let me be this funny.

Right now she is playing show and tell, passing around photos of her orchids, her birthdays, photos from before she was married to my grandpa, when she was the age I am now. She was a coal-haired war widow at 28, living in small town Southern Indiana. She worked as an operator and drove a car she bought herself, with white wall tires. She remembers what it cost her down to the cent.

LATER STILL

After nine days here, tending to my Nana’s health, my sister and I head home. From here on out, we take turns, between our family and my uncles family, someone will be here til ... whenever. Nana is back from the brink, so we are not so scared and mortality is not weighing so heavy on us and my Nana is not using a walker etc., and thusly my sister and mother and I are back to being annoyed with one another, as usual, taking each other for granted. My mom was imparting on us, in an overly stern manner, that Nana is to be given “fresh fruit every day” and then added “And by fresh fruit, I *do not* mean a cut-up apple. I mean *fresh fruit*.” My sister turned to me, and whispers, “If fresh fruit does not mean an apple, then what the fuck does she mean?”

Tonight, Nana demanded that I was going to say grace at dinner, not her. Which was fine. Nana’s table-prayers in the last week have been heavily informed by deathbed leanings, and last up to five minutes—thanking the lord, tearfully, for each and every year, for material bounty, for college admissions, asking for forgiveness—and finally, imploring god to help guide the food to help us how each of us need in our bodies, and to help us understand that whatever will be, will be—ending with “You know what to do lord. Amen,” and a fierce squeeze of the hands, eyes wet and lip quivering.

Nana and everyone assumed that since I am the most religious member of my family, I would know some official grace, but I don’t—and I hate praying out loud amongst other people, so I freejazzed it, kept it short. I thanked god for keeping Nana around and for the food and to please help resolve my mom’s bad attitude. Amen.

Once everyone went to bed, me and my sister, like two sequestered nerd jurors, retired to the laundry room. People are sleeping in most every room, so we chill in the room where no one will be disturbed, prop our feet up on the washer and dryer. Lauren trashy fashion magazines, I do all the funstuff that a dialup connection allows. It is 11 o’ clock in a retirement community that hedges a golf course, which we have already walked around a couple times. It is too late to skateboard, something I just discovered my sister knows how to do, too. We are going to take the rental and go cruise downtown. My Nana informed us there are hookers up at the traffic circle downtown. We are going because we want to know what hookers in a retirement community are like.

Today was up and down, the tension is giving way to nothing but sweet-mocking.

My mom came into the kitchen, after dinner, slightly agitated and somewhat baffled that Nana had asked her the same thing about the pie three times. “Three times,” sighs my mother for dramatic emphasis. My sister and I had the same response of total in-

difference to my mom's plight: "Well, no shit mom, *she has Alzheimer's*"—we answer in jinxing unison. Earlier, while my mother and sister and I prepped and dressed and powdered Nana, my uncle pokes his head in to see how she is doing, my Nana replied, yelling "GO AWAY! WE'RE HAVING AN ORGY!"—then adds, yelling into the other room after my totally embarrassed uncle—"don't get all red-faced like you don't know what an *orgy* is!"—this, from a woman, clad only in her bra, a diaper, and footies.

That made me feel like she will live forever.

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TIMOTHY LEARY IS REALLY, REALLY DEAD, MAN

Well, I'm a kindly guy, and I try to say nothing negative about anyone. I have always considered Brian Wilson to be a pathetic moron. It is not his fault. The

DNA, you know ... We have morons out there. I don't think that he is a child molester or anything evil, but he is just plain ... His elevator doesn't reach the top floor.
—Timothy Leary

In the spirit of honesty and openness, I have to admit that I once took Timothy Leary seriously. True, it was a long time ago, and I was ridiculously young and naïve, but the fact remains that when the high priest of LSD urged the world to "Turn on, tune in, and drop out," I said, "OK, daddy, and just how far out should I drop?"

For those of you not up on your ancient history, Leary was a Harvard professor of psychology who with another professor, Richard Alpert (who later reinvented himself as the "guru" Baba Ram Das), experimented on his students by giving them LSD and other psychedelic drugs, got fired, and devoted the rest of his life to urging people to get high as a solution to all of their problems.

I didn't need much convincing. By 1967 I had long been in the habit of getting drunk to deal with my problems, so taking a pill seemed like a logical and less messy way of accomplishing the same thing. Plus it had the advantage of being illegal and "underground," which obviously made drug-taking morally and culturally superior to boozing, which any mainstream bozo could do.

True, even in 1967 I found Leary faintly embarrassing. He was old enough to be my dad, and here he was traipsing around in a white robe, muttering gibberish cobbled together from half-understood Eastern religions with a messianic zeal more akin to a fundamentalist Bible Belt tent revival show.

When my youngish, scraggly-haired English professor showed up in class wearing a string of love beads and breathlessly telling us what Leary had said at his talk in Ann Arbor, I was sure I wanted

nothing to do with any of it. This was the era of "Don't trust anyone over 30," after all, and I was inclined to put the cut-off age at something more like 21.

But within six months, I had my own string of love beads and was pushing LSD—both the principle and the product—with the sullen insistence of the Detroit street thug I had been a year before. Leary's message was slightly more refined, along the lines of, "Take LSD and gain enlightenment," whereas mine was more like, "Take LSD or you're an asshole."

At least I practiced what I preached; I went on to drop LSD about a thousand times, enough to turn me into a full-fledged hippie dingbat. No doubt Leary took plenty of the stuff himself, but my friend Jayel, who often visited Leary's place in the Berkeley hills, told me that his drugs of choice were scotch and amphetamine.

I never met Leary myself, though I occasionally hung out with his son Jack, who himself had been taking psychedelic drugs since childhood, and appeared to be moderately to seriously damaged. The first time I met him he was tripping on a third of a gram of LSD, a dose equivalent to about 1300 tabs. I bought a few grams from him, but he wasn't that reliable, and his acid wasn't always of the best quality.

By that time—the early '70s—I had decided that my mission in life was to make LSD available to the masses by buying large quantities in California and shipping it out to the Midwest and East Coast. I was doing pretty well at it, better, in fact, than Tim Leary, who was in big trouble with the law again.

A minor marijuana bust had put Leary in prison, but he escaped with the help of the Weather Underground, the lunatic mad bomber fringe of what had been the New Left. He spent some time hiding out in Algeria along with Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panther leader who in his autobiography *Soul On Ice* had opined that raping white women was a "revolutionary act." Algeria is not a small country, but it was nowhere near big enough for two megalomaniacs on the scale of Cleaver and Leary, and since the Black Panthers were considered a more "serious" revolutionary force, Leary was forced to leave. He was picked up by government agents in, if memory serves me right, Afghanistan, and brought back to the USA in January of 1973.

As it happened, his plane and mine touched down almost simultaneously at Los Angeles International Airport. As my friend Ariel and I stepped off the gangway, floodlights came on and a TV reporter thrust a microphone in our faces. "Are you here to support Timothy Leary?" he asked.

It was easy to see why he'd picked on us. We were both tripping on acid, we'd been up for about three days straight, and I, with my gold lamé trousers and my pink and violet-toned glam rock makeup, would make a good visual on the six o'clock news. Behind the reporter I could make out the shapes of a couple dozen overwrought hippies holding up signs that said "Free Tim Now."

I was speechless, but Ariel, who actually knew Leary pretty well, shot back, "No, we're here to see the Rolling Stones." Which was exactly true; the Stones were doing a benefit concert that night for victims of the Nicaraguan earthquake, and when we'd decided to come

down for it, we hadn't yet heard about Tim Leary's capture.

I felt a little guilty enjoying myself at the concert while Leary languished in a cell facing 30 years in prison. I needn't have worried. Within a couple years he was out of jail, apparently because he'd cut a deal with the Feds to rat out nearly everybody who'd helped him in the previous few years. Even his own family turned against him; one of the last times I talked to Jack Leary he and Allen Ginsberg were coming out of a press conference organized by a group called PILL—People Investigating Leary's Lies—where he denounced his father as a government snitch.

That should have been the end of Timothy Leary, at least in terms of having any credibility in the hippie or "alternative" communities, but thanks to the goldfish-like memories of the truly drug-addled, Leary was soon back, pushing a varied agenda of cryogenics, flying saucers, and of course, more drugs. Eventually he became one of those generic celebrities, famous simply for being famous, lurking on the fringes of the Hollywood film and pop music scenes.

I had long since given up LSD myself, and the longer I stayed away from the drug, the more annoying I found Leary. It wasn't so much that he was a moronic leftover from the moronic 1960s. It was impossible to live in Northern California without constantly coming in contact with the human wreckage of that benighted era, and to be fair, there was still a fair bit of wreckage clattering about in my own brain.

It was more that after all those years, he hadn't learned anything, had never said, "Sorry, maybe I was wrong about a few things," had never engaged in a serious moment of self-reflection or self-criticism. Instead he kept coming up with ever more bizarre nonsense to "prove" that he had been right all along. He was like an old drunk who grabs hold of your sleeve and insists that you listen to his completely incoherent explanation of, well, he's getting to that in a minute if you'd just stop interrupting him ...

So it was only fitting and just that Leary, in his quest to keep his name and his legend alive, wandered into the radio lair of Nardwuar the Human Serviette. In a just world, Nardwuar would be infinitely more famous than Timothy Leary, and perhaps one day he will be. He's already becoming recognized as one of Canada's national treasures.

Nardwuar, for those of you who don't know him, is the hyperactive genius who fronts Vancouver, B.C.'s the Evaporators, and sometimes presents maniacal travelogues and commentaries on Much Music, Canada's version of MTV. But perhaps his greatest fame has come from his interviews with everyone from Snoop Doggy Dogg to Mikhail Gorbachev (given the opportunity to put just one question to the Soviet architect of perestroika and glasnost, Nardwuar asked, "Of all the political figures that Dr. Gorbachev has encountered, who wears the largest pants?").

Nardwuar has probably never taken an illegal drug in his life, but he's so much farther out there—and in there—than Tim Leary that the old acid-head should have been able to see he was out of his depth. But no, Leary waded right in to Nardwuar's tender trap.

"Are you the Hugh Hefner of LSD?" Nardwuar asked.

"Now that is the dumbest question," Leary sputtered, "Who's

got the award? You've got the award. I want to congratulate you. I have been interviewed thousands of times and I have met the greatest professional crazed interviewers, and you're right up there."

Well, yes, Leary got that much right; Nardwuar is right up there. But Nardwuar also got it right: Leary *was* the Hugh Hefner of LSD, and if he hadn't been so full of himself, he might have been able to admit it and even laugh about it. He saw even less humor in questions like, "Is Prozac the legal LSD of the 90s?" (Leary: "Where do you get these questions? Do you have committees of monkeys?") and "Do the guys with the LSD get the most chicks?"

That was the one that wrapped up the interview. Leary was beside himself. "The vulgar sordidness of that question is Olympic," he fumed. "'Getting chicks.' I mean, what does that mean, 'getting chicks?' That is a very vulgar '50s term. Man, you are out of it. Out of it!"

Never mind that LSD had worked very well over the years in terms of "getting chicks" for Dr. Leary, by lecturing Nardwuar in dated '60s rhetoric about being "out of it," the old dinosaur managed to make himself look even more ridiculous than when he predicted that the 21st century would see "a new species" being born, who would speak "a global language ... based on Nintendo."

Way back in 1969, the hippie band the Moody Blues had a song that went, "Timothy Leary is dead, no, no, he's outside looking in." At the time I had no idea what they were talking about, but liked the song anyway because it had a good melody. All these years later, Timothy Leary really is dead, and has been for several years. Which begs the question of why I'm bothering to dig up his memory again, especially if I'm only going to piss on it.

Well, the answer lies in that quote at the top of this column, which also came from the Nardwuar interview in 1994. "Would Brian Wilson be the same today if he didn't do LSD in the '60s?" Nardwuar asked, and Leary responded by branding the former Beach Boy as "a pathetic moron."

As it happened, I was simultaneously reading the interview and listening to the newly released recording of Brian Wilson's *Smile*. Although I grew up listening to the Beach Boys—and loved them—I've never been one of those "Brian Wilson is god" people. And *Smile*, while it's undeniably a work of genius, is probably a little too hippied out and experimental for me to listen to regularly.

But then I thought of the contrast. Here's Brian Wilson, something like 63 years old, having long struggled with mental illness and drug problems, and still able and willing to produce a monumental musical work to cap off a lifetime as one of America's greatest songwriters. And here's Timothy Leary, a man who not only completely and utterly wasted his own life, but also devoted himself to encouraging millions of young people to do the same, calling Brian Wilson "a pathetic moron."

The really sobering thing is that for much of my life, I probably had a lot in common with Tim Leary. I was quick to preach, quick to lecture, quick to proclaim that the world would be better off if everyone went along with whatever crackbrained idea had just excreted itself from my drug-addled mind. And instead of trying to create something of beauty myself, I wasted my energy

criticizing others who were. Oh well. We live and learn. At least in theory. The saddest thing about Timothy Leary is that I don't think he ever did.



Secretly, I think that people who don't like Christmas are either lazy, boring, or lame. You might also argue Jewish, but everyone can get

down with the non-baby Jesus aspects of Xmas. (Jehovah's Witnesses fall under the category of boring). What's not to like about Xmas? Consumerism? Bitter family memories? Go cry to your mama, because as an adult, you can do anything you want with Christmas. Everything from going to a porn store to drinking under a bridge is a whole new kind of fun on Xmas. Me, I'm a little more tacky-traditional. I'm drawn in and dazzled by colored lights and vaguely sinister, looming, light-up santas. Like a primate that has to swat at sparkling objects, I can't help myself. Who needs acid when there's Christmas? I love the iconography, I love the flamboyancy, I love the pageantry, giving stuff to my friends, eating cheese log, Chex Mix, and tree-shaped cookies. I think grumps across the land would benefit from getting the Yule branch out of their butts and exploring the unique possibilities.

A PILGRIMAGE

In Santa Rosa, Ca, there lies the (self-described) best ice skating rink **IN THE WORLD**, The Redwood Ice Arena. It was owned and operated by Peanuts-creator extraordinaire, Charles Schulz, up until the time of his death. In the cozy diner attached to the ice skating rink is where this great man got down with some hash browns and conjured new and exciting ways to yank away a football. As if that weren't reason enough for a pilgrimage, the rink itself is pleasingly tacky, done in a faux-Swiss Chalet style, with hanging eaves and facades of houses surrounding the rink, intermixed with evidence of Schulz everywhere—giant Snoopy dog house, giant Snoopy sculpture, and a shrine to the man himself at a fireside table in the diner.

In keeping with my chosen profession of hobo, I don't own a car. But Buzz managed to borrow one so we could make the hour and a half pilgrimage to The Best Ice Skating Rink in the World. Visions of skating and eating grilled cheese got us through the horrendous traffic like a photo of a pin-up girl in a GI's wallet. Finally, we saw the phony chalet eaves sparkling in the distance. We pulled into the parking lot, but there was a chain blocking the way. The rink was fucking closed!

Luckily, the all-you-can-eat buffet in the strip mall across the street was open so we proceeded to drown our sorrows in mountains of suspect food. The grease we ingested had some kind of chemical

in it that made us **NOT GIVE A FUCK**. Suddenly, it didn't matter that I didn't get to fall on my ass 10,000 times in front of a stained glass portrait of Snoopy. I felt at peace elbows deep in noodles and sushi and you-don't-even-want-to-know. Plus, it was so greasy, it was like a meal **AND** lip gloss. **SCORE!**

On the way home, I took some spooky backroads and the fog was so dense that ol' Nessie himself would've gotten lost. Around a bend, miles from home, there was a break in the fog, revealing an entire hillside covered in identical lit-up plastic snowmen. There were about 400 of the mofos marching into yuletide battle. Was it real-life or a Devo video?

QUALITY TIME

Statistics say the suicide rate goes up around the holidays, which make sense given the emphasis on family. But is it from lack of family or overexposure to family that drives people over the edge? Personally, I've come to enjoy going to my parents' house for the holidays as it makes me take myself less seriously. Family is funny, because they mirror the deep horror of being ourselves and what could make for better comedy than that?

Over the course of Christmas Eve and into the next morning, my parents took turns cornering me whenever a moment presented itself (like when I stealthily stole to the kitchen for a late night bite of cheese log). The conversation would assume the tone of casual conversation, but I could tell that this was something that they'd discussed and finalized amongst themselves. Was I aware of the great job opportunities afforded by the US government? And didn't I see how getting a gov't job would be the best thing for me? Whereas I appreciate that they care about what happens to me, I also have to wonder: these people who have known me my whole life, do they know me at all? This thought returned to me many times over the course of my visit, such as when I unwrapped a stonewashed button-up shirt, size grande that I think I peeped Roseanne Barr wearing in the '80s once.

When it was time to go home, my Dad gave me a ride. I should've known I had stepped into a parallel universe when I got into the car and he was blaring Black Sabbath(!?!), which is not his (retired gov't agent) style. Then he started sloppily swearing and zinging nonsensical sentiments my way such as, "I don't understand you at all. You're just like me." Finally, I figured out that he was wasted. He's been on a soup and shake fast for six months and has dropped about 100 pounds, and his holiday cocktails had nowhere to go but straight to the dome.

STILL NOT SURE I DID THE RIGHT THING ...

Of all of my annual traditions, the one I've kept rolling the longest is my Christmas day viewing of The Shittiest Movie Possible. There was a hearty crop of shitty movie contenders this year. Some criteria to keep an eye out for when selecting the shittiest movie is: any live action movie based on a cartoon, anything with Tim Allen, anything with babies, Sinbad, or talking animals. Some previous winners include: *Look Who's Talking Now*, *Wayne's World 2*, *Beethoven's 2nd*, *Miss Congeniality*, some movie with Tim Allen and

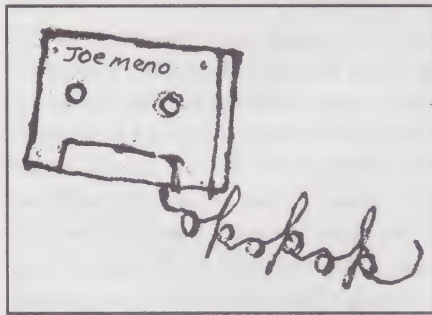
Kirstie Alley where they hide out in an Amish community, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, and *Jingle All The Way*. This is by no means a complete list, which should give you an idea of how long one woman can be devoted to a dumb idea.

This year, the Fat Albert movie seemed like a shoo-in. However, when I checked the paper Christmas morning, it wasn't playing downtown! An important part of the thrill of hanging out on Christmas is walking around a deserted city, feeling like Omega Man. What was I to do? There was another movie that seemed to possess the right stuff: *Meet the Fockers* was a sequel, a family comedy, and it had a damn baby in it. But was it cheating? Was I screwing up the cosmic equilibrium of the upcoming year by not going with my first gut instinct? I did the only thing I could do and asked the Magic 8 Ball-esque Ask Yoda doll that Richie Bucher gave me: Should I go downtown? I asked.

He regarded me coolly, wisely, rubberly, and answered: "Yes I feel this is."

I still don't know. Did I do the right thing?

thanks to buzz & my 54th st family, visit my website: www.gimmeaction.com



DID YOU SUCK IN 2004?

Secretly, on a piece of notebook paper, I have been keeping track of people who have sucked it up in 2004. If you would like to know

whether you are on this list or not, it goes like this:

1. *Men with ponytails.* Unless you are a samurai or a sound guy, then there really is no need, so please stop it. The world is scary and random enough without your ponytail and your black duster, believe me. If you are a magician or weightlifter of some kind, this also does not apply.
2. *Doctors.* With all the fucking drug advertisements on TV, could you please test these drugs to be sure that they don't accidentally kill people? That sounds like a great fucking concept. Let's make that happen, STAT. Also, can you stop worrying about what old white men need? How about less erection-inducing and hair-replacement pills and more cancer and AIDS antidotes? When can we start seeing a million commercials about those?
3. *Post punk rock progressives.* With four years to plan, we still could not beat Bush: with all our computer skills and DIY attitude and anthems, we couldn't find some 14 year-old genius in Montana to figure out a way to hack into some system somewhere and fuck up the voting machines. Jesus, this life is nothing at all like the movie *War Games* and that is what is very, very disappointing.
4. "Musicians" who don't sing their own songs. What the fuck, Eminem? Are you really no better than Ashlee Simpson? Yes, other coun-

tries hate us because of our foreign policy. Having "musicians" who can't sing their own songs is the reason I sometimes hate this country.

5. *Rich women who let their dogs shit on the sidewalk.* If I had a stun gun, there would be a line of white women in fur coats lying on the sidewalk beside the steaming piles of their dog's excrement. It would be like an art project, an installation piece maybe.

6. *The couple fighting behind me at the Hot Snakes show.* Dude, why did you bring her? You can tell she doesn't want to be there. Her hands are crossed in front of her chest and she has yawned like eight million times. Bring her home. She is not having a good time. None of us are having a good time listening to you fight. I think Rick Froberg is giving you both a dirty look.

7. *People over the age of 20 who smoke.* Duh. What are you, still 15? Are you still rebelling against your parents' divorce or something? Grow up already. It's dumb, nothing you or Bill Maher can say excuses the dumbness. You are one step away from being put on an island with men who have ponytails and rich women who let their dogs shit on the sidewalk and then imagine what kind of life you're gonna have, it will be like the most uncomfortable renaissance fair of all time, ever.

8. *The Democrats.* Never before has being a liberal seemed more sad, nebbish, or defeatist. Where is the Democrats' action-star governor? Where is the Democratic Arnold S.? Someone who knows how to dismantle a bomb and how to use a hunting knife? Someone exactly like Wesley Snipes? Based on his work in *New Jack City*, shouldn't he be mayor or governor of something?

9. *Girlfriends who don't mind that their boyfriends go to strip clubs.* OK, I don't know how you can act like you're cool with it, because it's fucking creepy and if you, as a lady, don't say something, I will. I know you want to seem all avant-garde and cutting edge by knowing your boyfriend/husband/owner goes and blows his money at strip joints and laughs about it, but how badly damaged are you to ignore this? Would he permit you to blow cash gawking at some other dude's junk? Definitely not. When he takes you to Hooters and you laugh, it's not funny, girl, it's sad. And while we're on the subject ...

10. *People who go to Hooters.* Can you even imagine a fucking restaurant called "Sacks" or "Balls" or "Scrotums" with dudes walking around with tight-ass orange shorts showing off their nuttolls? Jesus. Just Jesus. It's like a strip club for people afraid of pubic hair or something, but with hot wings and ranch dressing and shit.

For the year, 2005, here is a list of what I'd like to see more of, all of which are pretty low-key, I think:

1. People talking like pirates all the time
2. Snow in Chicago year round
3. Bands with keyboards singing about teenage love
4. Songs with handclaps
5. You dressing the way you did in eighth grade, like Robert Smith from the Cure ©

Kung Fu Suicide

by Tao Lin

I have tickets to the Shaolin master kung-fu thing. They cost \$45 or something. My girlfriend used her credit card. She has the tickets. I knock on her door.

Things haven't been good. A few days ago, I stopped talking to her. I still hung out 24 hours a day with her, I just stopped talking. She asked if anything was wrong. She asked about 20 times. At first I said no. Nothing is wrong. Then I said yes, but that I didn't know what was wrong. Then I said that I just feel like shit, and then she stopped asking.

We don't talk on the subway. We're on our way to Shaolin. It's cold out. I start to notice things. Stuff like how trapped I am. How I live in an apartment with roommates and how the city is an island really and how outside the city there're all these rivers and mountains and goats and other animals. I'm going to college for something undecided, and that too has me trapped. Tuition and everything. And I work at the library. It took weeks to get that job. Weeks I don't want to do again, so I'm stuck at the library too. And each day there's more stuff in my room. My girlfriend says stuff like, "We've been together for whatever

amount of time so we should try and work things out." Sometimes I want to throw her out the window. I really do. Get it over with. The 14th floor. A few months ago, I threw a beach ball out her window. We laughed at that. Now every couple of days, she tells me that she's unhappy. She wants to hang out with her friends, she wants me to be friends with her friends, she wants to have sex more, she wants space, etc.

We're at the Shaolin thing. Our seats are not too good. The martial art monks look like GI Joe figures from here. They flip around and mock fight each other. It's not bad. It's OK. Everything is OK. The lights are all out except on the stage. Every once in a while, people clap. It's comfortable in here. Dark and cool. My girlfriend sits to my left. At intermission, she goes to the bathroom. I do too. I look at her face as she comes back to sit down. I start wishing she was funnier, not so sentimental, smarter, prettier, and more into The Lawrence Arms and Lorrie Moore. Overall, I just wish she could be exactly like me. No one says anything out loud. I talk in my head to myself. My face is blank as sour cream.

On the subway back, I don't say anything. Neither does she. I imagine being

one of the Shaolin monks. I'd walk down Broadway after midnight when there're not that many people, only I wouldn't walk, I'd be doing flips the whole time. I wonder if I'd be happy if that was my life. I'd stand in one spot doing flips. I'd have a McDonald's cup on the ground for cash donations. Off the subway, I look at my girlfriend and think about how much I don't like her. She lives across the hall in the school dorm building. I look at her. Her head is really big. Way too big. I'm just not attracted to her. What if I told her this? She'd probably cry or something. We go in the dorm building. This is in Chinatown. I go stand in front of the elevators. She keeps walking. There are more elevators in back. I say her name. She keeps walking. I accept this. I take the elevator up to my room.

In my room, I masturbate to Internet porn. I mess around with my computer. My roommate hasn't come back yet. It's winter break still. I look around my room. There's an acoustic guitar, about 40 books, 100 CDs, a snare drum, half a dozen drumsticks, and a whole ton of other crap. I pick up a drumstick and throw it across the room. It hits the wall and lands on the guitar, wedges in the strings. I call my girlfriend. She doesn't answer. I keep calling. I get mad that she doesn't answer. I think, she's not answering just because she knows I'll keep calling. I know that I'm not good

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS: Keep those submissions rolling in – and please adhere to the following guidelines: keep your work around 1600 words or less, write your name and email address on the story itself, and send files in rtf or doc format to ppfiction@yahoo.com.

RIP Larry Brown, who died at 53 on Nov. 24. Brown was a Mississippi firefighter who barely graduated high school. His novels and short stories portrayed hard-drinking chain-smoking working-class characters in the rural South. Some idiot critic called him "The King of White Trash," to which he replied, "I'm just a common man who was real lucky to find out what I wanted to do with my life." Too bad he didn't get to do it very long. — Leah Ryan

enough to get another girlfriend. So I keep calling. Finally, she answers.

She comes over. I let her in. Everything is calm. Everything is very composed. We have mute, hard sex, like robots. After, everything is even calmer. In the shower, I think about the Shaolin monks. I wonder if they ever get sad, if they ever feel the weight of things, the pressure of things, a weight that they can't feel, actually, that is unfeeling, because there is no weight, and then there's the lessening of weight, a pull away, like they're becoming sparse and might float away. I wonder if the Shaolin monks ever get that way. I wonder what the Shaolin monks do when they feel that way. If they have a special jump kick routine that instantly cures it. Some kind of anti-depression, mood-enhancing roundhouse kick exercise.

Out of the shower, I turn off the lights and lie on my bed adjacent my girlfriend. I don't tell her that I'm happy. I don't say that I never want to fight again. I don't touch her hair and say that I love her. I lie on my side because the bed is too small and she's flat on her back taking up all the space. I say I'm going to sleep. She says OK.

I wake up depressed. I get afraid that I'll always wake up depressed from now on. My stomach hurts for some reason. We go to her room down the hall to make food. I notice how ugly she is in the morning.

I follow behind her. Neither of us knows if the other is mad or sad or unsatisfied or what. So we don't say anything. It takes forever to walk down the hall to her room. I look at the walls. I wish that I was really strong, so that I could punch a hole in the wall like the Terminator. I'd punch a hole in the wall and rip out some kind of pipe and water would burst out into the hallway and everything would be OK.

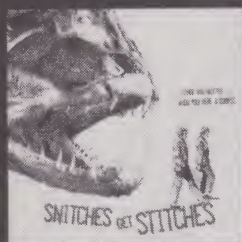
In her room, I sit on her bed. I think about jumping out her window. I think that it would be scary falling all that way. I'd get that weird dropped feeling in my stomach. And what would my last words be? Would I try and be funny and say that I'm stepping out to the deli for a sandwich? Would I be histrionic and tell her I love and will always love her? Would I apologize for everything? What if I jump kicked out the window? I picture this and almost laugh.

I lie down on her bed. I tell her that my stomach hurts. I pull the blanket over everything but my head. I try to sleep. She sits down on the bed with a book. Instead of lying down next to me and holding me or something, she has this book. I think of the word fuck. Fuck her. No, not intercourse. Not that fuck. I try and clarify in my mind. I can't. Fuck, I think. Fuck everything. I open my eyes a slit, so that I can see her but she can't tell I'm looking.

She's reading her book. Something pretentious. I hate her. I hate how she uses all these technical terms, "deconstructionist," "Derrida Ellis Bloom," "objectivist appropriation poetry," "enjambment," and thinks she's so smart. I close my eyes. I secretly hate everyone in the world. I think that I'm better than everyone else. I wonder if anyone else is like this. I hate myself for being like this. I try and close my eyes, but they're already closed. I feel my face. Brows intense. Angry. I try and relax. In case she's looking. I feel more and more trapped. Under this blanket that she's sitting on, in this room, in this building, in this Manhattan island, in this city on this Earth, atmosphere, solar system, galaxy, universe. I scream in my head. I open my eyes. I feel my face all tense. It probably looks furious. I try and relax it. Then I think that I can look mad if I want. I twist my face up even more, like I'm disgusted. I nudge her. I want her to see my face. My eyes start getting wet. I nudge her again. "What," she says. But she doesn't look. I lose the angry look on my face. I can't sustain it. Now I look sad. I think about shoving her off the bed. I nudge her harder. She says, "What." Loud, like she's mad. I push her hard off the bed. I close my eyes tight and try to squeeze out tears. I scrunch it all up. I do everything I can to make my face the meanest and saddest thing ever. ©

REATARDS

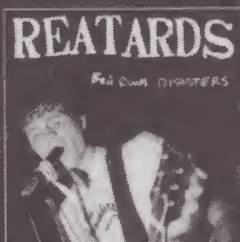
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Get Your Own Press Coverage

By Liz Worth

You've been working the merch tables at all your shows to push your band's CD and by now you feel it's time to gain some recognition outside of your local all-ages venue. Getting good press doesn't come from buying ad space in a magazine or by trying to sell yourself with catchy buzzwords. It comes from being able to make some impressive music and by being a vigilant promoter, too.

Although getting coverage probably isn't going to turn you into a rock star—just think of how many reviews you see in this magazine alone—getting press attention gets your name out. It impresses club bookers, label reps, and might snag a few new fans. So here are some tips on how to do your own press.

Writing a Press Release

Once you've set aside a bunch of promo CDs to send out, you'll need to write up a press release. This usually includes a band bio, background on the album, a description of your sound, and a list of the members. This is your chance to tell journalists what's behind your music. If you or your bandmates don't feel that writing is your forte, ask a friend who has a good hold on the written word to help you out.

When piecing your press release together, it's important to say what you want people to know about your band. But remember that just because your girlfriend told you that your band sounds just like the Clash doesn't mean you do. Don't draw unlikely comparisons because you think it will boost your chances of a favorable review. A lot of journalists read the press releases before they listen to the full album, so it's better to be honest instead of building up expectations that your music might not meet. Honesty will get you a fairer review; exaggeration in your press release could end up being used against you.

Don't Go Glossy

A common mistake with young bands is that they put too much money into fancy packaging. The glossiest press release and best full color photos aren't going to help you as much as providing a quality recording. And just because something looks pretty doesn't mean a reviewer is going to give it a priority listen.

Major label releases usually only come with a press release printed on a standard sheet of white paper. They usually just send burned CDs as promo copies, and if they even bother to send it in a jewel case, the artwork isn't always included. The big guys don't spend money on pretty packages, and you shouldn't either.

Make a Trip to the Post Office

The most desired press attention is that of the glossy music monthlies and the alternative publications that act as cheerleaders for independent culture. Send promo copies out to the magazines that tend to give a lot of space to reviews and that don't exclusively stick to major label releases. But an often-overlooked option is sending out CDs to zines. There are many zinesters out there

who are working hard to promote young bands. Their circulation might not be as big as professional mags, but zines build loyal readerships and getting their attention could be a way for you to tap into a whole new fanbase.

Newspapers tend to reserve very little space for reviews unless they're working with a high profile release. You might be lucky to have a reporter at your city's paper who is supportive of the local music scene, but don't bother wasting the postage otherwise.

Before you send out your promo copies, it also helps to take note of certain writers who tend to focus on the same kind of music you're into, or who favor artists who are similar to your band's sound. Get their contact information and send CDs to their attention.

Be patient. Magazines are often planned months ahead of time. Sending a short, polite e-mail to check if your CD was received is all right, but persistence can get annoying. Depending on publication dates, it could be a few months before your review pops up so don't be disappointed if there isn't an immediate response.

Promoting Live Shows

You don't need to have a CD out to get press. Playing gigs on a fairly regular basis can be a way to see your name in print, too. If you don't usually play outside of your city, you'll have to hit up local publications. Again, try to seek out the writers who you feel have tastes akin to yours. Send them an e-mail about your show and offer to put them and a friend on the guest list. Don't make journalists pay to see you: treat this as an invitation and make it accessible for them. Besides, if you do end up getting some good press, your future shows will see a better turnout and you can make up for all the guest-listing then.

Dealing With Bad Press

Getting bad press comes with the territory. Anyone who puts themselves and their talent out there for the public has to expect and accept criticism, even when it's negative. If you feel resentment over a particularly scathing review that came from your local alternative weekly, don't send the writer a 10-page letter using every cuss word you know—this will only hold you back from getting attention from that publication later on. Once you and your band have let some time pass and you're ready to put out a new release or play some new material at your shows, invite that same publication to write about you again. They might end up sending a writer with a different perspective than the last one. And if it is the same writer who ends up covering your show, he or she might notice that there has been an improvement in your band. If not, don't let it get to you—being bad-mouthed is better than being ignored.

The Final Word

A lot of bands go untouched by music writers. If you've put as much effort as you can into trying to get mentioned, your problem might not be the media, but your music, and unfortunately there's nothing any journalist can do about that. ☺

DIY sex EARLY TO BED

by sex lady searah

Dear Sex Lady,

My partner and I have kind of gotten into a sexual rut. We have experimented with a lot of different things over the years and really know each other's bodies very well. Lately though, we just seem to be doing the same things over and over. Any ideas of new things to try?

Signed,

Bored

Dear Bored,

One of the great things about having a long-term sex partner is that you get to know their body inside and out—and hopefully that means you get to know how to please them easily. The downside to this can be that sex becomes almost *too* easy. You know the spots to hit, you hit 'em, and then you're done. Fun, but maybe not too exciting.

There are, of course, lots of things that you can do to slow things down and make sex a little more interesting. Light bondage, a new toy, a surprise blow job during *CSI*, or a little role-playing are always fun choices, but a great way to really take a step back and start exploring each other's bodies in a new way is with a good old fashioned erotic massage.

Get out of your in/out, lick/suck routine with a long evening (or day) of slow, sexy sensual touching. Turn off your phone, find some good sexy music that you both like, light some freakin' candles, and if you can, turn up the heat so you will be comfortably warm while you are playing. There are a couple of supplies that you will want to have on hand besides the music and candles:

- Lubrication for the massage
- A bowl of hot water to keep the massage oil/lube warm
- A sheet or bedspread that you won't mind possibly getting a little greasy

What you use as massage "oil" for erotic massage is not necessarily what you use for regular body massage. If you or your

partner is a woman, you are going to need a non-oil based lubricant. Oil inside a woman's vagina is an invitation to infection. Silicone-based lubricants (available at sex shops) have a similar texture to oil, but are much safer for girl parts. Designed to be used on the genitals these are also great for all over body massage (or for un-sticking your rusted bike chain). Silicone lube is usually a bit more expensive than water-based, but it stays slippery for a very, very long time. Eros and Uberlube are some of the best silicone lubes on the market. Silicone lube is also flavorless, so if you do a little licking after the main event, it won't taste like pine trees or fake roses.

With boy parts, you can pretty much use just about anything, so if you have some nice massage oil already, go ahead and use that. But if you plan to be mounting your man after you wax his rod, stay away from anything oil-based. In addition to not being good for the ladies, oil breaks down latex on contact making condoms useless (and I know you all are practicing safer sex).

Now that you have all your equipment gathered, the lights are low and your damn roommates are out for the night, settle whoever is going first on the bed or comfortably on the floor with some blankets and pillows. Making sure your lube/oil is warmed a bit, rub some between your hands and begin to massage the more non-sensual parts of your partner. You want your lover super- duper relaxed, so gently but firmly rub their shoulders, back, legs, and arms. Check in and ask if they want your touch to be harder or softer. Try and keep one hand on your sweetie at all times, even when you have to grab a little more lube or switch positions.

Remember when you are massaging your partner to focus on him or her. Put all your energy into making them feel marvelous and do your best to read their non-verbal (or verbal) cues. If they moan particularly loud when you touch a certain spot, go back to that spot. When they get to the point when you can sense they want you to take it "downtown" (hips gyrating is a particularly telling cue), start by touching their thighs and abdomen lightly with your fingertips or even a feather. After some very light touches, you can

start to apply a little more pressure with your fingers and hands, but you don't want to go from zero to 60 right away as this activity isn't about getting someone off quickly. You want to take your partner on a slow, sensual journey (that sentence made me puke too, but it really does sum it up).

Here are a few tips for touching your partner:

If your partner is a man

Because of the way that men's sexual response cycle works, once a guy has ejaculated, he is pretty much finished for a while, so when you are massaging his sensitive boy parts you want to make sure that you slow down or stop before he comes, at least at first (eventually you'll want to let him finish). You may have to ask your man for help in telling you when this is about to happen.

Using plenty of lube or massage oil, experiment with different ways of stroking your lover's cock. Using both hands, put pressure on the underside of his shaft with your thumbs while you move your hands up and down his shaft. Or try the "Pleasure Tunnel" (a term coined by author Sadie Allison in her book *Tickle His Pickle*): Making an OK sign around the head of his cock, make a downward stroke, immediately following with the same stroke using your other hand. Then you can reverse and use upwards strokes. Try alternating firm strokes with whisper soft teasing strokes. There are endless different ways to touch your guy's penis, so get creative and try any strokes you can come up with. And don't forget his balls. Tickle, tease and massage them as well (but don't squeeze too tightly). Also, the space in between his anus and testicles (often called the 'taint') is a very sensitive spot that you don't want to neglect.

If your guy is up for it, you can take it to another level by massaging his anus. Put a little lube on your finger and make soft circular motions around the outside of his asshole. Ask him if he likes that and if he wants you to put your finger inside. If he's down with that, make a come hither motion with your finger (so you are pushing towards the front of his body) and see if you can locate

his prostate. The prostate feels like a softish bump (like the end of your nose) and many, many guys find that having pressure put there gives them explosive orgasms.

If your partner is a woman

Make sure you are using a non-oil-based lube and softly stroke her whole vulva. With slippery fingers, massage her labia lips and around (but not right on) her clitoris. Soft strokes alternating with somewhat firmer ones can keep the action going for a long time. Remember the goal here isn't to bring her to instant orgasm. Explore all her folds. Use the palm of your hand and placing it over her whole pubic area, rock it in slow circular motions. Using both thumbs, massage up and down on both sides of her cunt. With one hand on her pussy and one hand on her stomach or breast, make the same circular motion with your hands, first lightly, then a little firmer. Don't neglect her hips and inner thighs too!

She too may like a little penetration (vaginal or anal) with her massage, but check with her first.

Finishing up

So there are a couple ways you can finish off your tender, loving, slow massage. You can massage your partner to climax. You can lean down and finish him or her off with a good blow/lick job. If you're going to be licking your lover, be aware of what you used as massage "oil"—anything you may have used on him that has fragrance or essential oils may not taste so yummy. If you like to end your massage with oral, your best bet is to use a silicone lube as they have very, very little flavor. You can also end your massage with a good hard fuck, which will beat any salon massage, any day, hands down. ☺

Come visit my store, Early to Bed, at 5232 N. Sheridan in Chicago. Or visit us online at www.early2bed.com. Got questions for me? Feel free to send them to sextasy@early2bed.com. Thanks!

Resources: *Tickle His Pickle* by Sadie Allison; *The Art of Sensual Massage* by Gordon Inkeles; *The Art of Vulva Massage* (film) by Joseph Kramer; Sexuality.org

DIY food

EVERYTHING THAT EATS, LIVES

by stacey gengo

Pickled

Half of my ancestry hails from Eastern Europe, which in our family's food heritage is overshadowed by my Italian other half. Our weekends were always set aside for the Sunday Italian dinner that usually began at two, but preparations began the previous day. There was a bustling, chaotic planning around the various dishes for the Sunday meal that revolved around a red sauce on the stove destined for various pastas, lasagnas, eggplant, and cutlet dishes with other courses to follow with the sauce as a side dish. This productive kitchen was weekend work that went well into the following week. These meals took precedent to the evening weekday meals, which often consisted of Sunday dinner leftovers.

Lucky for me, my Polish grandmother played a large part in my young life. Frequently during the school week, my sister and I would meet her after school at the local department store where she worked in the lingerie department. We would do our homework on the brightly lit cases of fancy negligees and stockings while my grandmother finished her shift. Going home with her for dinner seemed like secret moments, hidden from the boisterous Italian-fed weekends and their leftovers. Weekday meals with her consisted of noodles with cottage cheese served with pickled beets, or a goulash with pickled mushrooms. A cold pickled relish always accompanied the meal, as did cottage cheese when it wasn't an ingredient of the dish. It took me years to learn that beets are not naturally sweet and sour and that sauerkraut came from a cabbage. It was here that I developed my taste for pickled foods.

A pickle is any brine, vinegar or spicy solution used to preserve or flavor food. A pickle is also a vegetable, specifically a cucumber, preserved in such a solution. Pickling is the preservation of foods in an acidic environment, which discourages the growth of harmful microbes. Historically, home pickling is most earnestly practiced during food shortages. Faced with food shortages and food left to rot in the fields, homes are turned into pickling centers just after the harvest. It's the best way to ensure food for the following year.

Pickled foods can be purchased in most groceries and markets, though most are processed with corn syrup, which gives them an unnatural sweetness, and other preservatives. A better alternative is to pickle your own foods, and not just cucumbers. Radishes, cauliflower, carrots, beets, turnips—all would make good pickles!

There are two specific types of pickling, one more nutritionally beneficial than the other.

The first method of pickling is by lactic fermentation, or *brining*, that encourages acid-producing bacteria to grow. This process preserves the vegetable in its own juices, without the addition of heat, cold, or preservatives. This is the ideal method in preserving all the nutritional value of the vegetable. The main method of preservation before vinegar processing, lactic fermentation is one of the oldest forms of keeping food fresh. The first noted use of this type of food was as a staple in feeding the workers building the Great Wall of China. Sauerkraut during this time was cabbage covered in wine.

Generally the lactic fermentation process involves drawing liquid out of the tissue of foods by osmosis and then supplementing it with a brine to cover the vegetables. Basically, two to three tablespoons of salt per quart of vegetables is the proper ratio, which is strong enough to prevent undesirable bacteria from forming. As in milk curdling, there are lactic microbial organisms which are necessary to develop and convert natural sugars to lactic acid. Once this acidic environment is created, it prohibits the growth of harmful bacteria.

In addition to the nutritional benefits of this process, digestibility is another. This type of food is an important complement to a meal. Though due to its high acidic content, lacto-fermented foods should be eaten in moderation. These are uncooked foods, though a lacto-fermented sauerkraut can be cooked, losing trace nutritional value in the cooking process.

The second method of pickling is vinegar preservation, the more common form of pickling. Similar to lactic fermentation, an acidic environment is created that prohibits the growth of microorganisms. Bacteria are almost entirely inactive, though molds can grow on the surface if it is not covered. The main difference between the two methods is that this method adds the acid, rather than letting it naturally occur as it does in lactic fermentation.

Acetic acid from vinegar is added to the vegetable in this preservation process. This is an easier and safer method and thus used in the commercial industry of pickling. The main disadvantages to this type of preservation are that some nutritional qualities of the foods are lost in this process, as well as the level of digestibility compared to lactic fermentation. Vinegar preservation also tastes more acidic and should be consumed in smaller quantities.

Here are some examples of both types of preservation process and my grandmother's noodle recipe to eat your beets with.

Cucumbers pickled by lactic fermentation

Dissolve one and one-half tablespoons of sea salt in two cups of spring water.

Place a few peppercorns, onion slices, and garlic cloves in the bottom of a one and one-half quart jar that has been sterilized with a rubber seal. (See note about sterilizing below)

If the cucumbers are large, pierce them with a fork in order for them to absorb brine and place as many in a jar as will stand upright.

Add dill or fennel leaves.

Fill the jar with brine—the salt water mixture—stopping three-quarters of an inch below the rim, ensuring the brine doesn't overflow.

Close jar tightly.

The next day fermentation should be noticeable; an indication will be the bubbling process with foam near the surface of the jar.

Store in a cool place once the brine becomes cloudy.

In six weeks the pickles will be ready to eat!

Beets preserved in vinegar

Boil two pounds of beets in salted boiling water for about 20 minutes, or until tender.

In a separate saucepan, bring to boil one quart of white wine vinegar with six whole black peppercorns, a half teaspoon of cracked black pepper and one small whole red pepper. Boil for about two minutes and remove from heat.

Peel the beets when cool enough to handle.

Place the beets into sterilized jars.

Pour the vinegar mixture over the beets, filling until three quarters of an inch below the rim.

Let contents cool before sealing the jars.

Store in a cool place.

After two weeks the beets will be ready to eat alongside my grandmother's noodle dish!

Isabel's cheese noodles

Sauté one yellow onion in two tablespoons of butter over moderate heat until brown in color but not crisp—about 15 minutes or so.

In the meanwhile boil one package of wide egg noodles in salted boiling water.

Cook the noodles until tender—eight to 10 minutes.

Drain the noodles and place the drained noodles back in the pot used for boiling.

Add sautéed onion and one container of cottage cheese that has been kept at room temperature while cooking.

Mix ingredients.

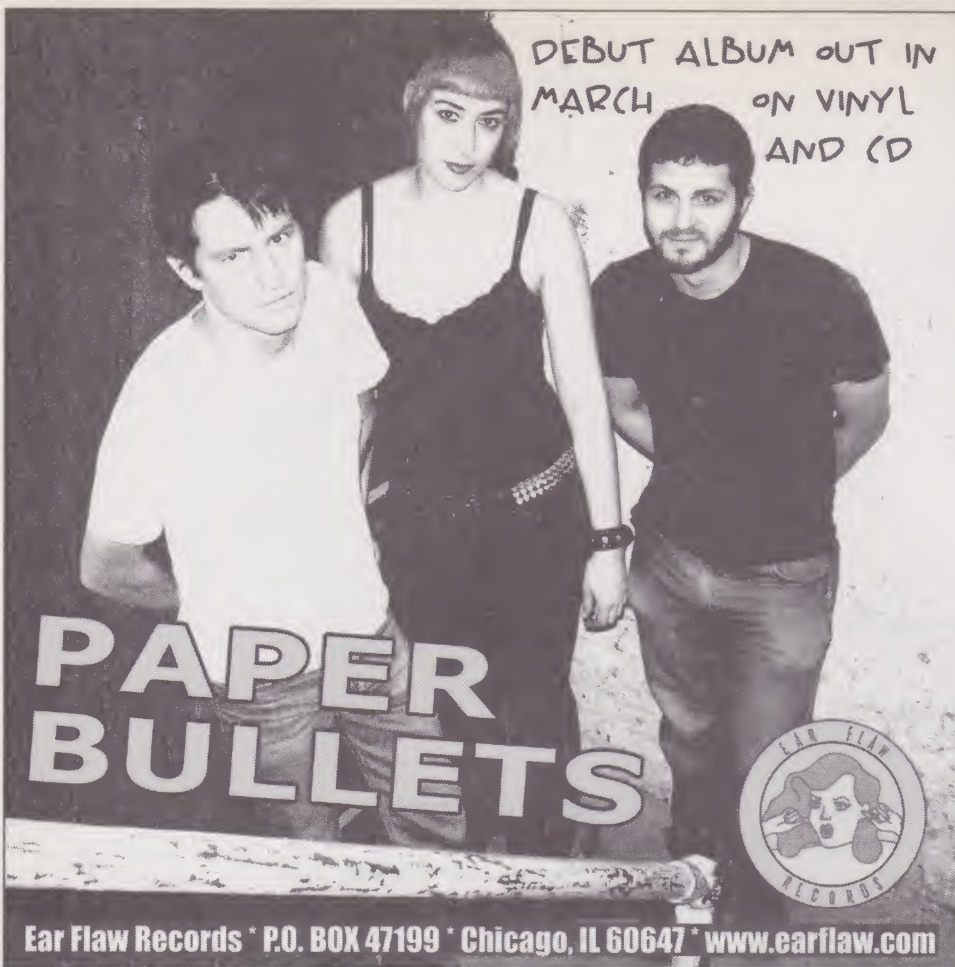
Add cracked black pepper and salt to taste.

Serve with the pickled beets.


How to sterilize jars before pickling

Place canning jars, lids and seals in the bottom of a large pot, and fill with water to cover jars by one to two inches. Bring water to a boil, and boil for at least 10 minutes. Dip a set of tongs in boiling water for 30 seconds before using to remove the jars, lids, and seals. Use tongs to transfer equipment to a towel for drying. Make sure the jars, lids, and seals are completely dry before canning. ©

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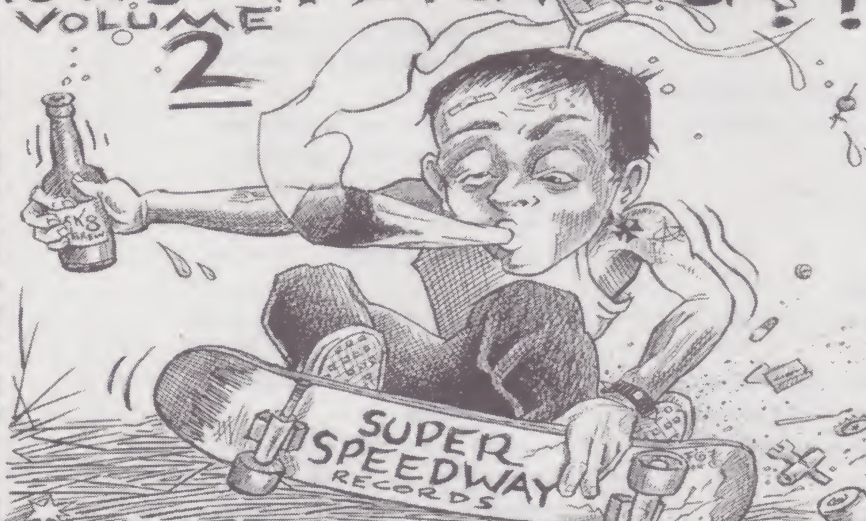
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The ladies of Del Cielo triumphantly return with their second full-length, *Us vs. Them*. A follow-up to 2001's *Wish and Wait*, *Us vs. Them* is a collection of charged rock songs and contemplative ballads that alternately evoke passion, rawness, and a carefree outlook that are both refreshing and vital.

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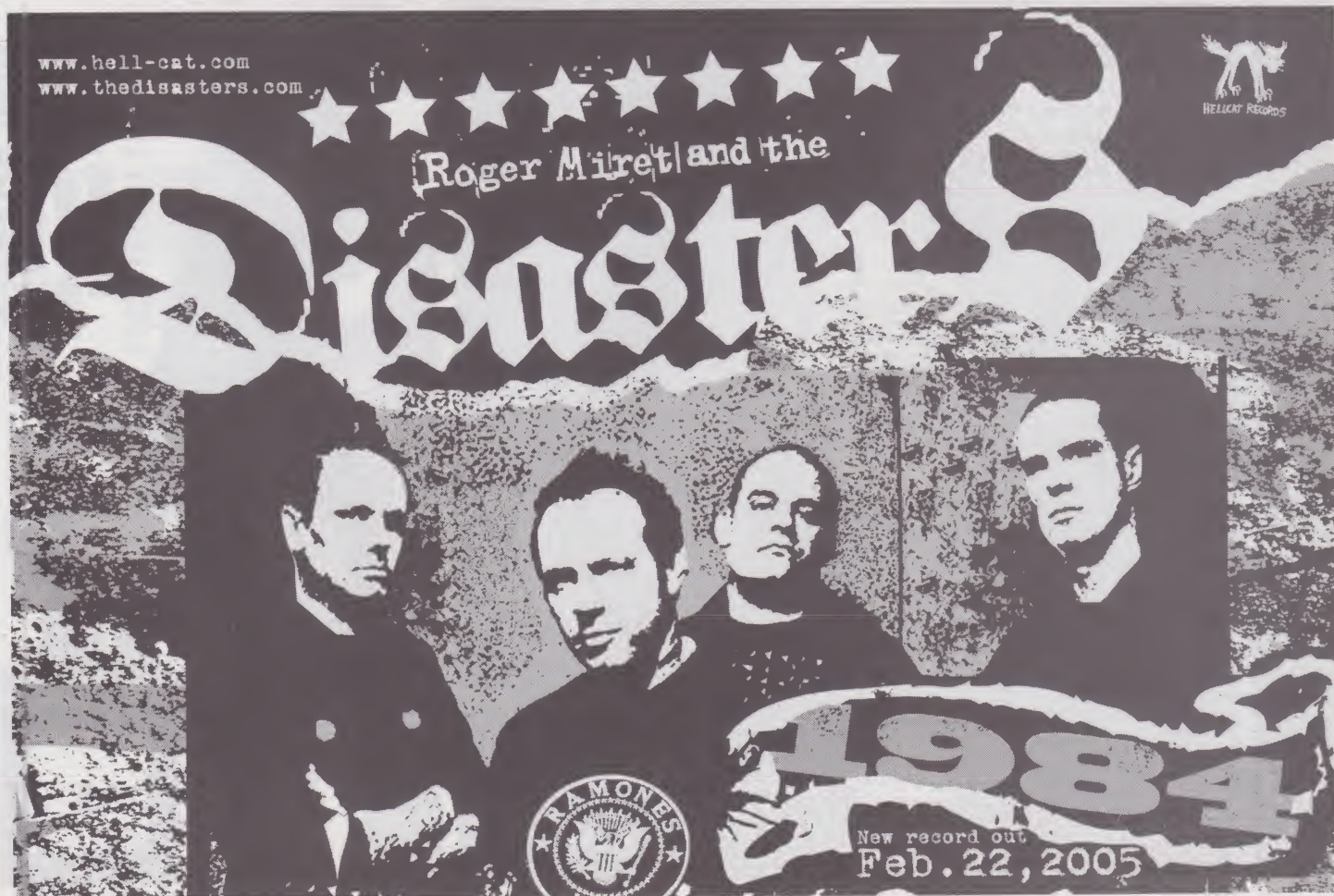
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Red-Eyed Regular

Four alternate versions of songs from their upcoming full-length, *Texas One Ten*, due out in 2005, plus a live recording of *Bryan's Song* from the 2002 Græze Rock Festival in Belgium. Produced by Mass Giorgini (Screaching Weasel, Squirtgun, Common Rider), *Red-Eyed Regular* picks up where 2000's *Copper Regret* left off: catchy melodies and hooks, unique instrumental and vocal arrangements and an underlying thematic tension that gives the songs an unsettling edge.

"Another masterpiece from Chicago's most-overlooked band. It's a mystery as to why these guys are still such a well kept secret."

— Punk Planet



stereo south

www.stereosouth.com

Justamere Road

The debut release from Chicago trio Stereo South wields an original blend of punk-influenced, indie-rock, fueled by driving rhythms and strong melodies. Recorded with Matt Allison of Atlas Studios in Chicago, *Justamere Road* introduces you to the stylings of a band that refuses to become pigeonholed by lack of imagination or modern rock standards.

"Pleasant indie rock/pop full of hooks and acoustic/electric interplay."

— Punk Planet

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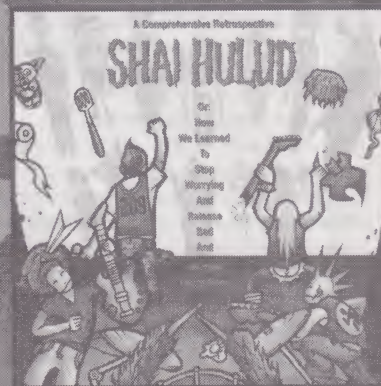


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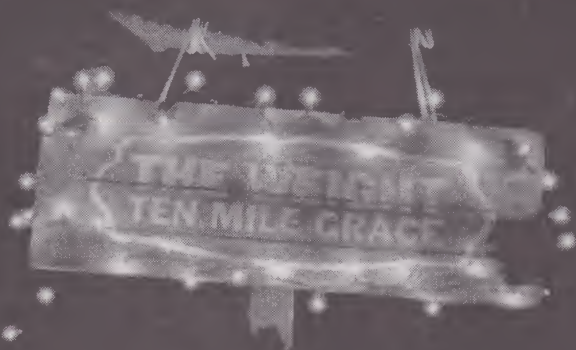
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music

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Amy Adoyzie (AA), Dan Agacki (DA), Eric Action (EA), Abbie Amadio (AJA), Bill Angelbeck (BA), Jay Castaldi (JC), Vincent Chung (VC), Carla Costa (CC), Art Ettinger (AE), Melissa Geils (MG), Julie Gerstein (JG), Tara Goe (TG), Jason Gooder (JG), Emily Hausman (EH), Dave Hofer (DH), Don Irwin (DI), Ari Joffe (AJ), Scott Jones (SJ), Tim Kuehl (TK), Dan Laidman (DAL), Ryan Leach (RL), Justin Marciniak (JM), Todd Martens (TM), Krystle Miller (KM), Sean Moeller (SM), (MC) Dana Morse (DM), Brian Moss (BM), Bart Niedzalkowski (BN), Missy Paul (MP), Rex Reason (RR), Neal Shah (NS), Tony Stasiek (TS) Lisa Weingarth (LW) EDITED BY KYLE RYAN (KR)

🔗 A.C. Cotton – Notes For The Conversation, CD

This is rock 'n' roll down to the bare knuckles: getting any more straightforward would require a new dimension. It's coming out of Portland, where I didn't know they drank so much Blue Ribbon, smoked so many cigarettes or went about their daily business in such a dusty, rustic manner. There's a lot of the deep south going through lead singer Alan Charing's thinned-out blood as he cops Dylan's sense of story and John Davis' dry honesty. (SM)
Self-released, PO Box 13701, Portland, OR 97213, www.acotton.com

Across Five Aprils – Living In The Moment, CD

Pretty interesting emo/hardcore stuff, lots of catchy melodies with intricate guitar parts and plenty of octave chords. They switch it up at times with chunkier riffs as well as a few softer, acoustic moments. The only downside is when the singer does the metal growl, which doesn't really fit. Other than that, good stuff. (NS)
Indianola, www.indianolarecords.com

Adversary Workers, The – The Inner Workings Of Change, CD

These guys describe their sound as "genre defiance," and I'd completely agree. The off-the-wall guitars remind me of Huggy Bear. This has a completely incohesive feeling that some might dig, but totally turns me off. It sounds like everyone in the band is playing a different song. (KM)
Collective, PO Box 22172, St. Louis, MO 63116, www.collectiverecords.com

Affect, The – Secrets & Lies, CD

Another new wave revival act, The Affect's dark dance-punk follows closely follows The Faint's formula. If you just can't get enough of this, I suggest downloading a couple of tracks ("Multiplies" and "Burning In The Bed On Fire"). Otherwise, just wait for The Faint's next album. They do it much better. (LW)
HitChhiker, 254 SCR 427 Suite 229, Longwood, FL 32750, www.hitchhikerrecords.com

Agnostic Front – Another Voice, CD

AF have modernized their sound quite a bit and would fit well on a bill with Hatebreed or Terror. One thing that kills it for me are Roger's vocals, with their weird yelled/sung/wheezed quality. Another Voice? How about another *Victim In Pain*? (DA)
Nuclear Blast, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd., Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.nuclearblast.de

Ahleuchtastatlas – The Same And The Other, CD

Straddling a fine line between instrumental rock and free jazz, most of what Ahleuchtastatlas play sounds finely composed, but they also keep things open for interpretation. When jagged compositions that stop on a dime mix with atonal improvisations, it becomes difficult to tell where structure ends and chaotic freedom begins. (SJ)
Noreaster Failed Industries, 2406 Phillips Drive, Alexandria, VA 22306, www.nflabel.com

Air Conditioning – Weakness, CD

Right when I go and blast Level Plane for sucking, they release something I like. Get ready for your brain to melt. This is some great distorted noise.

The booklet is a nice nine-panel fold out too. Bonus. (DA)
Level Plane, PO Box 7926, Charlottesville, VA 22906 www.level-plane.com

Akimbo – City Of The Stars, CD

Man, the attempt to describe bands through labels gets to be too much sometimes. Still, I can't think of a better way to describe Akimbo than prog-punk metalcore with a little '70s rock. The music's good, but I think I just made myself puke. (RR)
Seventh Rule, 2303 Montrose, Floor One, Chicago, IL 60618, www.seventhrule.com

All American Werewolves – Hate Rock USA, CD

Thankfully the title is a misnomer, and this isn't "hate rock" in the Skrew-driver sense. Instead, these Werewolves whip up some all-American garage rock. It's nothing new, but it's clearly not trying to be. It's raw, energetic and fun—nothing to hate about this rock at all. (JC)
Eugene, PO Box 1002, Lexington, KY 40588, www.eugenerecords.com

All Parallels – Formulate A Tragedy, CD

This is just plain horrible: overproduced alterna-radio rock fit for background music at Taco Bell. I am glad I don't listen to the radio enough to make an accurate comparison, but I am sure as soon as Carson Daly hears this shit, they will be his new favorite band. (TK)
On The Rise, PO Box 2471, Westfield, NJ 07091, www.otrecords.com

All Systems Fail – S/T, 7"

This is a 7" for all the black-clad punks. There's a definite D-Beat influence here, but the songs are a little long and don't really go anywhere. I had a hard time staying interested because it was all midpaced tempos with trade-off vocals. (DA)
Loderbuck Records, PO Box 25453, Salt Lake City, UT 84125 www.loderbuck.com

Alleged Gunmen – Return To Zero, 12"

If Gidget were to star in a Spaghetti Western, the Alleged Gunmen would be well suited for the soundtrack. Although the vocals could easily be bested by a lobotomized mute on valium, there's something oddly charming about this band's shoddy, but inventive, desperado surf punk. (BM)
Kapow, www.kapowrecords.com

Alliance / Los Destructos – split, 7"

Here are five political punk songs from two Scottish bands who have some Spanish influences. The overall sound includes screaming vocals and guitars similar to early Conflict. (DI)
General Bacardi, www.generalbacardi.de.vu

Aloha – Here Comes Everyone, CD

Aloha mixes old-fashioned pop psychedelics with modern electronics, creating an album that's a bit Brian Eno and a bit Radiohead. I applaud the use of Mellotron. The arrangements are about setting a mood, but those who pay attention to the words will find clever songs that trace the history of the world to the death of Elvis and forgotten second-grade teachers. (TM)
Polyvinyl, PO Box 7140 Champaign, IL 61826-7140, www.polyvinylrecords.com

AM – Francophiles & Skinny Ties, CDEP

Retro '80s rock from Brooklyn with crunchier guitar settings and song titles like "Sex N Drugs." Unfortunately, its retro stylings miss the added dimension of 20/20 hindsight or some contemporary interpretation. If they were the opening band, I'd wish I had shown up a bit later. (BA)
American Laundromat, PO Box 1514, Huntington, NY 11743, www.americanlaundromatrecords.com

🔗 Amanda Woodward – S/T, CD

Everyone's favorite French hardcore dudes, Amanda Woodward, have finally released a CD collection compiling their demo, the (now out of print?) *Ultramort* CD and a compilation track. I'm kind of surprised they didn't put the tracks from the *Pleine De Grace 7"* on here as well, as I don't think it's available in CD format. Longtime fans will not find anything new here, but for those just getting into the band, this CD is now the only place you can find the *Ultramort* recordings, which many consider AW's finest. Good stuff. (KM)
Destructure, 206 Rue Caponiere, 14000 Caen, France, www.destructurerecords.com; Golden Brown, PO Box 8402, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

American Tourists – Kinderdeszorns, CD

Why this CD was bookended with the most idiotic set of prank calls I've ever heard, I'll never know. Otherwise, this German trio plays frantic punk rock sung in both German and English. The music is a lot better than the prank calls. (RR)
ZeitstraBe, Postfach 28 22, 24518 Neumünster, Germany, www.zeitstraBe.de

Amestory / Wilson, Tim – split, CD

Tim Wilson has the singer/songwriter thing going on. It's really mellow, acoustic-guitar-driven stuff. Decent, but not remarkable. Amestory is a little more upbeat, but not much. It's still pretty mellow. The more I listen to it, the more this CD bores me. (DA)
Portia, 1068 Calle Rey, Thousand Oaks, CA 91360, www.portiarecords.com

Amplified Heat – In for Sin, CD

Three bothers churn out total '70s -style blues-metal à la Cream, Deep Purple, Blue Cheer and Black Sabbath. The up-beat blues lying underneath the metal make the sound confusing, frantic and appealing at the same time. I found myself enjoying this disc more than I expected. The brothers have the chops to pull this off. (EA)
Arclight Records, 1403 Rio Grande St., Austin, TX 78701, www.arclightrecords.com

Ammoncontact – One In An Infinity Of Ways, CD

Rare-groove and free-jazz enthusiasts might extend an olive branch to this California duo's pastiche of blips, bleeps and instrumental soul collages. There are no gripping, intense moments, but only the closing title track—on which Lil Sci drops a random flow—would bug your neighborhood chillout room. (TS)
Plug Research, 4519 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90029 www.plugresearch.com

🔗 An Albatross / XBXXRX – split, 7"

XBXXRX are back and sounding a whole lot different than I remember them, which is most likely due to a new presence in the band in the form of Weasel

Walter (of Flying Luttenbachers and Lake Of Dracula fame). They contribute two noisy, avant/free-jazz, Skin Graft-ish screamy "pieces" that culminate into a chorus of never-ending, locked-groove sampled screams. Frightening, yet pretty genius. And since it seems that every single An Albatross release comes directly to me for review, there isn't really anything more I can say about them except that they contribute a track of their signature carnival-like, quasi-dance destruction, screamo-metal insanity. (MG) GSL, PO Box 65091, Los Angeles, CA 90065, www.goldstandardlabs.com

Anderson, Jason – The Wreath, CD

Jason Anderson's newest CD is filled with swaying, lo-fi acoustic rock. The songs linger as Anderson takes his time with the lyrics, making his delivery slow and deliberate over his careful strumming. The best tracks include "Theory And Practice," "O, Jael" and "The Hospital Song." Simply, this album is wonderful. (MP)

K, Box 7154, Olympia, WA 98507, www.kreccs.com

Anderson, Kasey – Dead Roses, CD

Kasey Anderson covers country, rock 'n' roll and every incarnation of the two genres on this release. While none of the music is ground-breaking, it is very skillfully crafted and well-played, which leads me to believe that this 24-year-old is one to watch in the alt-country scene. (LW)

Self-released, www.kaseyanderson.com

Annihilation Time – S/T, CD

The two opening songs are energetic attempts at classic hardcore, but after that, AT have trouble keeping up the pace, and the album drags a little in the middle as the guitar sound gets a lot more rock and a bit less interesting. Not my bag, but all right for what it is. (TG)

Manic Ride, PO Box 42593, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.manicriderecords.com

Apathy Code, The – Thick Red Moment, CD

This band's sound is a mix of some of the more popular rock genres of the past few years. It comes off radio-friendly to me, but lacks the hooks and polish a band needed for that. There are some great rock-guitar riffs on here, but the whiney, self-loathing vocal styling killed my enjoyment. (KM)

Self-released, PO Box 627, New Brunswick, NJ 08903, www.theapathycode.net

Apocalypse Wow! – S/T, CD

Prototypically raw, fast, metallic punk, with hardcore/grind bits and some fun old movie and politico samples thrown in. Production is a bit on the raw side, which actually makes the album more interesting. The music and lyrics are a tad boring, but hey, the samples are great. (TG)

Self-released, PO Box 1946, Venice, CA 90294, apocalypsewow@comcast.net

Article, The – Let's Not & Wish We Did, CDEP

Energetic guitar-pop EP that's slightly reminiscent of Built To Spill. The duo gets good mileage out of the instrument, morphing it into keyboard-like sounds. Hooky, fast, loaded with harmonies and worth catching on the road. (TM)

Self-released, www.theartidemusic.com

Askeleton – Angry Album Or Psychic Songs, CD

Think Postal Service without the jump-cut beats and neat ways of saying things. In other words, it's a cookie-cutter keyboard-pop album that seems terrified to try anything tougher. (TS)

Goodnight, 690 Murphy Ave. SW, No. B8, Atlanta, GA 30310, www.goodnightrecords.com

Assailant, The – S/T, CD

Abrasive, screamy, and sometimes spooky-sounding hardcore played by guys you can tell just don't give a fuck about what's popular in hardcore these days. Eight songs in about nine minutes, none of them bad. Keep your eyes peeled for these guys. (DH)

Black Matter, PO Box 666, Troy, NY 12181, www.blackmatterrecords.com

Assistant / This Ship Will Sink / Takaru – split, CD

First up, the broken-up Assistant rise from the grave with a song clocking in at 7:31. Amazingly, their intensity and sheer force make it go by like it were three minutes. RIP, guys! Next up, This Ship Will Sink (with a member of The Assistant) rocked my face off with what sounds to be a natural evolution from old band to new: same intensity, same great songwriting, same great low end, new and improved groove from time to time. Another winner. Batting third we have the heaviest hitters on the disc, Takaru. Hot off the heels of their excellent full-length *There Can Be Only None*, these guys are continuing to take hardcore up a notch. With three songs to the other bands' one each, it's good to know that there are still bands out there who can write fast, quality songs to scream along to. All proceeds go towards helping DRUM, a "community-based social justice organization of working class and poor South Asian immigrants and immigrant detainees and their families in NYC." Three bands, five great songs, one great cause. (DH)

Waking, c/o Evan Kilgore, 1803 Riverside Dr., Apt. 5H, New York, NY 10034, www.wakingrecords.com

Asunder – A Clarion Call, CD

Spooky-ass gothic dirge metal. Long, slow tunes (four tracks in 52 min-

utes) full of dark melodies and vocals that sound like an evil monk holding a black mass in some old castle. Cool production by hot shot, stoner-rock producer Billy Anderson. Definitely bad trip music! (AJ)

Life Is Abuse, PO Box 20524, Oakland, CA 94620, www.lifeisabuse.com

Atari Star, The – Prayer & Pretend, CD

People tell me there are a whole bunch of other bands with "Atari" in their names. Being a grouch and a hermit, I haven't heard any of them, but I bet you my Donkey Kong lunch box that none of them sounds like this group. The Atari Star is the project of Marc Ruvalo and Davey Houle, the duo behind Johann's Face Records. This record is packed with layered, complex compositions. At its best, it is exciting and dramatic, like in the ominous rocker that opens the album or in the mournful dirge "Asphalt Everest." That song really gets me, with its soft, warm strumming and ice-cold trumpet that serenades you, siren-like in the background. Then they throw in lyrics like: "He owns 5,000-plus records, they make a solid wall / but he can't decide what to play next, at all." All in all this is a lovely and challenging record. One critical point, though, is that they're probably being held back a bit by inconsistent singing: The vocalist is great on the slow songs, but occasionally stiff and affected during the fast ones. (DAL)

Johann's Face Records, PO Box 479164, Chicago, IL 60647, www.johannsfacerecords.com

Autumn Offering, The – Revelations Of The Unsung, CD

Above average, midtempo metalcore with some sweet gasoline vocals. Not bad, but only time will tell how good these guys can be. They remind me of Himsa a bit. (DH)

Stillborn, PO Box 3019, New Haven, CT 06515, www.stillbornrecords.com

Autumn Project, The – La Luna De Negra, CD

The Autumn Project play slow, unearthly, instrumental music that is at times so lush you forget they are but three people armed with guitar, bass, drums and keyboards. They start each song minimally, then build gradually into walloping crescendos and finish by tapering back down. This is emotional music that puts you into a trance with visions of Arctic floes and glacial movements. The songs are basically untitled, as they're only listed by track number. The creepy "Six" contains samples of people talking about the Book of Revelations and burning rock 'n' roll records, which is blasphemy for those of us who attend the Church of Rock 'N' Roll. (SJ)

Zu, www.zurecords.com

AWOL One – S/T, CD

The growing reconnaissance between indie rock and hip-hop has evolved into some funky-ass guitar music and a few seriously sad-sack

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the records we receive (CDs, CDRs and vinyl only—so long as they come from a label that isn't owned/partially owned by a major label), but we reserve the right not to review something we feel isn't appropriate for Punk Planet. Also, due to the volume we receive, some records fall through the cracks. Feel free to send us your record(s) for review (4229. N. Honore St., Chicago IL 60613), but expect up to a five-month lag time for it to appear in the magazine. So send stuff EARLY, and include any and all contact information. CDRs that aren't advance promo copies from labels end up in our demo section. All reissues are also in their own section. Records marked with a little ear (☞) are "highlighted" reviews, which means reviewers found them especially noteworthy (not necessarily good or bad). Finally, please keep in mind that if you send us your record, we might not like it. The review is merely one person's opinion, written without God's endorsement. Any questions or concerns can be directed to Kyle Ryan at reviews@punkplanet.com. Please DO NOT CALL the office, as Kyle is not there full-time. Thanks!



MCs. AWOL One treats us to his mokey epitaph here. The record's cover art probably cost the boy a few bucks toward the artist behind Notorious B.I.G.'s *Ready To Die*. Rumored to be rushed into a month's recording time because of contract disputes (dude, god didn't even need a week), this features the cancer-voiced wordsayer's scattered moping about his low self-esteem, a wife and kid that mysteriously departed him and hardly articulated observations about the other thorns in his temples. Imagine Pedro the Lion with deeper bass. The only track that sounds more than tossed-off is "Believe," which begins with more good feelings than a Toys "R" Us commercial, but soon takes a depressive U-turn: "Baby, don't walk away again / when I say the things that I believe in." It's a fabulous disaster—and possibly a covert advertisement for Paxil. (TS)
Paladin Creative Super Co., 1608 Pacific Ave., Suite 203, Venice, CA 90291, www.paladincreative.com

Bandages, The – S/T, CDEP

A polished example of slick, piano-led rock that really tries, but never gets invited in. It's lasting in few ways, meaning The Bandages will wear be a big regional draw for life, settling for those local one-offs with The Verve Pipe or Sister Hazel. (SM)
Self-released, 815 N. Euclid Ave., Oak Park, IL 60302, www.thebandages.com

♫ Bang Bang – 1977, 7"

Bang Bang is a smart group of kids. Initially, I had little expectations for this 45. Titrating your record 1977 is redundant (unless you're Ash), and this record's weakness is just that: It's not 1977 anymore. Joe Strummer signaled a call to arms in "1977." He exercises his Orwellian fixation and repeats messages prominent at the time (in his own way). Bang Bang recounts The Clash's time in a romanticized way. However, there is no Clash, Sex Pistols or Ramones in 2004, so it's time to move on. Musically, the single has a lot of energy (a lot of Dolls influence), and, with more challenging lyrics and ideas, the band has the making of a strong group. The B Side is a damn good cover of The Wipers' "Mystery." I absolutely adore this song (Greg Sage rules) and Bang Bang's stripped down version has me hooked like an ex-Warhol superstar on amphetamine. With lyrical growth, Bang Bang could be a contender. (RI)
Conspirators in Sound, 19368 Fairlane Ct., Livonia, MI 48152, www.conspiratorsinsound.com

Bars – Introducing..., CD

This is what it sounds like when hardcore kids discover rock 'n' roll. Standard disillusioned hardcore lyrics and vocals hang over snarling guitars playing catchy rock riffs at a slower pace, with little percussive elements. It's either better or worse than that description would lead you to believe. (RR)
Equal Vision, PO Box 38202, Albany, NY 12203-8202, www.equalvision.com

♫ Bear Claw – Find The Sun, CD

Bear Claw must be fans of the cause-and-effect theory. The three-piece, which features members from Chicago's Hello, Operator, builds each track's fever pitch from the restraint of the brooding lulls. Storms are replaced by calm, creating musical symmetry that's equal parts dissonant and melodic. Scott Picco hammers his tightly wound snare like he's playing an arpeggio instead of a simple rhythm, and the dueling bass guitars of Rich Fessler and Rob Rasperlich (a duo whose call-and-response vocals are driven and primal) are so guttural and low-slung that they register below the radar, coming out of the same murky depths as their hometown predecessors The Jesus Lizard and Big Black. Which serves as an easy explanation for the appearance of

the album's engineer, Steve Albini, who uses his trademark ear to capture the band's gratifyingly raw sound. (CC)
Sickroom, PO Box 47830, Chicago, IL 60647, www.sickroomrecords.com

Before Today – A Celebration Of An Ending, CD

Holy shit, it's the second coming of Chris-, uh, I mean, Thrice! This is just your typical MTV2 melodic-emo-punk with a slight metal edge. (MG)
Equal Vision, PO Box 38202, Albany, NY 12203, www.equalvision.com

♫ Big D And The Kid's Table – How It Goes, CD

I'm usually not a fan of the whole ska-punk sound; I find most of it too jokey for my tastes, like kids' show cartoon music. So it says a lot that I actually dig this disc. I think it's because Big D And The Kid's Table's sound starts out with a semi-raw pop-punk foundation and then uses the horns in a more soul/Motown kind of way, as counter melodies to cradle the riffs. Plus, their singer, Dave, has an aggressive style that doesn't sound at all forced or contrived. The dude's got lyrics too. This formula produces some really catchy moments on tunes like "LAX" (with awesome lyrics that really stick it to the silver-spoon hipster crowd) and "Moment Without An End." The only down side to the album is the length. They nearly filled the disc to the 80-minute max with 20 tunes, some of which are fillers, not killers. But I guess they're the type of band that wants to give their fans their money's worth, so you can't knock that. Worth checking out, for sure. (AJ)
Springman, PO Box 2043, Cupertino, CA 95015, www.springmanrecords.com

Big Screen, The – Yours Today, Mine Tomorrow, CDEP

The vocalist of this Florida emo-pop band, Daniel Pudnik, is the brother of New Found Glory's vocalist. That fact might help this band get a Vans-dad foot in the music industry's crowded door, but this mature and catchy EP blows away anything I've heard by NFG. (AE)
Undecided, 7460 NW 127th Terr., Parkland, FL 33076, www.undecidedrecords.com

Big Thicket – Sexual Breakfast, CD

A virtual one-man Zeppelin, Big Thicket sounds thick and heavy. The vocals are decent, but drumming is rather weak. The problem with one-man bands is the lack of connectivity you feel in the great heavy bands of metal's past. This disc is stale and makes you want to pull out a classic instead. (ES)
Strictly Amateur Films, PO Box 1876, Aptos, CA 95001-1876, www.strictlyamateurfilms.com

Billy Nayer Show – Rabbit, CD

Mixing loose rhythms, offbeat song structures and creepily sultry male vocals, Rabbit begins with a sort of strange familiarity. But the album takes a bizarre turn with the overall oddity of the lyrics ("Chippy-Chin"), the cartoonish, villainous vocal/musical ramblings and the freakishly delivered love songs, things get plain weird—and not in a good way. (AJA)
BSG / self-released, www.billynayer.com

Biography Of Ferns – Merchants Of Sleep And Purpose, CD

The same undermotivated, overeducated thread that sews together Pavement, The Fall, and the Television Personalities has a home with this Seattle group. Kinda shouty, kinda shimmery, pretty darn good for driving long distances, alone. (TS)
Self-released, www.biographyofferns.com

Black Mountain – S/T, CD

This superb debut takes everything good about psychedelic and stoner rock and then throws heavy doses of the Velvet Underground. The gritty, yet dreamy, songs grab you and pull you into their dark underworld. Familiar, but fresh, Black Mountain are an invigorating breath into '70s revivalism. (MP)
Jagjaguwar, 1499 W. Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.jagjaguwar.com

Blood Meridian – We Almost Made It Home, CD

Sad country-rock tunes with a touch of that classic late '60s Dylan feel—but not nearly as good. Midtempo tunes with lots of reverberated guitars, piano, mandolin, slide guitars and minor keys. The singer has a really weepy half-drunken slur to him. Bit of a downer, really. (AJ)
Teenage USA, PO Box 91, 689 Queen St. W., Toronto, Ontario, M6 1E6, Canada, www.teenageusa.com

Bloodstains – A Darker Shade Of Black, CD

With a name like Bloodstains, I expected more than the kind of bland, run-of-the-mill, midtempo punk rock I get to review each bi-month, but there you have it. More pissed off dudes in a band with a bald singer whose gasoline vocal stylings grated on my nerves. Meh. (KM)
Ammonia, 475 Commonwealth Ave., Ste. 403, Boston, MA 02115, www.ammonia.com

Bloodstains – Heroin, 7"

This band plays straight-up, no-frills dirt punk. Rock, studs, and all can be found with direct influences taken from Motorhead, Sick Of It All, and all your favorite gritty punk bands. Would I lie to you? (DM)
FNS, PO Box 1299 Boston, MA 02130, www.fnsboston.net

Blonde Alibi, The – Just Tell Me Who It Was, CD

This seven-song demo sadly lacks any contact information, as this is a solid hardcore debut, with a militant attitude, clever vocal interplay and nice background harmonies. (TM)
No contact info provided

Boardlords, The – Ride Again, CD

Kind of goofy, fun punk that alternates between mid-paced and fast, melodic skate punk. They kind of remind me of the Vandals' newer stuff. Nothing groundbreaking, but I imagine they'd be fun to see. Nice booklet too. (NS)
Volatile, www.volatilerecords.com

♫ Bonfire Madigan – I Bleed: A Decade Of Song, CD

Madigan Shive was half of Seattle's Tattle Tale, and she is first chair, cello, in her orchestra. The CD title is a reference to being a woman full of power, and this 70-minute musical journey takes you to powerful women like Rosa Parks and Joan of Arc (and a love letter to a drug addict). The music is centered on the cello and voice, but sometimes includes drums and guitar. The lyrics are so powerful, meaningful and emotional that trying to sum them up in a few words is a crime. Do yourself a favor and pick up this "best of" collection because you won't be sorry. (DI)
Self-released, 3128 16th St., #244, San Francisco, CA 94103, www.bonfiremadigan.com

Boyracer – Happenstance, CD

Many of the 23 lo-fi punk and pop tracks on Happenstance bury the needle in the red and assault eardrums. Only committed listeners with strong ears and a fondness for brief, modest, Robert Pollard-like recordings should subject themselves to the dentist-drill distortion and feedback. Otherwise, it's not worth the headache. (JM)
Happy Happy Birthday To Me, PO Box 742, Athens, GA 30603, www.hhbttm.com

Break Bread – S/T, CDEP

This is honors-class hip-hop from Canadians who like to work hard, name-check Joyce DeWitt, and spot 24-hour breakfast joints across the land. In other words, they're just about everyone you know, spare their ability to make accordions and violins sound totally street. (TS)
Peanuts & Corn, Box 30093-RPO Marpole, Vancouver, BC, V6P 6S3, Canada www.peanutsandcorn.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Eric Action (EA)

Statics, Pinball Junkies. A great Punk Rock Trivial Pursuit question would be "Who was the first recording artist on Rip Off Records?" The Statics. One of the most underrated garage band of the '90s, the Statics took the Mumies/Supercharger/Billy Childish sound and tried to make it their own. They were younger than their contemporaries, and their enthusiasm showed, especially early in their career, when they were fresh and exciting. After a couple of LPs, numerous singles, comp tracks and splits, the Statics called it quits about five years after their first release. So I am choosing their Estrus 10" for my spotlight this month. Many fans, and Zach of the Statics think this may be their worst record, but I love it. Unfortunately this vinyl only release is now out of print, so you will need to tape it, download it or find a copy in a dustbin. I love all their releases, but Pinball Junkies is their most lo-fi, fast paced and dirtiest. The title track, with its dancing bass line, is so hooky that I dare you not to bob your head. Considering they were a Northwest band, it was fitting to cover the Wipers' "Let's Go, Let's Go Away" on this slab. If you missed the boat on the Statics, I suggest you hunt this and all their singles down. Their two LPs on Rip Off Records are easy to find. There's also a singles compilation that the other 499 owners of it, besides me, probably won't sell. Pick it all up if you can find it.

Last five records on my turntable: Hunches Hobo Sunrise; The Who, Who Sell Out; V/A, Teenage Shutdown Vol. 1; Miss Mary, My Friend 7"; and the A-Lines / Miss Mary split 7".

Brian And Chris – 3, CDEP

Brian and Chris are good at creating their blend of organic instruments and looped synthetic melodies, but it adds up to the same melancholy mixture that post-rock bands have been kickin' out for a decade now. Formulaic songwriting is safe but doesn't bring anything new to the table. (CC)
Dielectric Records, 472 1/2 Alcatraz Ave., Oakland, CA 94609, www.dielectricrecords.com

Broken – Homeland Insecurity, CD

From the grossly understated home of tough guy hXc comes Broken. They're tough, they're big guys, and they bore me with boring lyrics while being big and tough and wishing they were from NYC. (DM)
Feralette, 6204 Hillsboro Road Nashville, TN 37215, www.feralette.com

Broken Toys, The – A Fistful Of Caulk, CD

Get past the silly title and cover art, and you'll find some sweet, hard-edged melodic pop punk along the lines of the first two Goo Goo Dolls records. The Broken Toys are a good band that doesn't take itself too seriously, which is nice in these days of emo crybabies. (JC)
Self-released, 12 Miller St., Metuen, MA 01844, www.thebrokentoy.com

Bury The Living / Evil Army – split, 7"

This split gives you two street-punk bands that don't differ much from one another. Both bands have gruff male vocals and have speedy guitar riffs—and don't forget the political lyrics. Not Good. (EH)
Soul Is Cheap PO Box 11552, Memphis, TN 38111, www.soulischeap.com

Bury Your Dead – Cover Your Tracks, CD

Standard mosh metal. The most interesting thing about this album is that each song is named after a Tom Cruise movie: Well, interesting or obsessed. Cocktail is sadly overlooked, though. This CD might inspire floor-punching or a trip to the video store, but little else. (NS)
Victory, 346 N. Justice St., Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

By The End Of Tonight – Fireworks On Ice, CDEP

By The End Of Tonight are a talented quartet that play vocal-less prog rock. The first three songs are on the intricate side, while "It's Christmas Time Again..." is a lusciously beautiful epic. (SJ)
Temporary Residence Ltd, PO Box 11390, Portland, OR 97211, www.temporariyresidence.com

Calamalka – Shredders Dub, CD

Vancouver's Calamalka make some heavy dub. The beats are obese, fatter than fat, and at a pacing fit for slow nodding. These instrumental, electronic dubs need some variety, and that is provided in the subtle, interesting melodic bits within all the heaviness. (BA)
Plug Research, 4519 Santa Monica Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.plugresearch.com

Caliban – The Opposite From Within, CD

Typical nü-metal garbage: big, blasting riffs with screamed vocals that segue into melodic "pretty" parts. Just a shade cooler than Papa Roach. They use a few fast "metalcore" tempos that hit that testosterone button, but there are a ton of way more exciting "heavy" bands out there. (AJ)
Abacus, 2323 W. El Segundo Blvd, Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.abacusrecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Amy Adoyzie (AA)

The Dismemberment Plan, Emergency & I. It's an irregular heartbeat that isn't harmful to your health. It pumps blood to all those places that have become stagnant with cynicism and time. Travis Morrison's jolting, stuttering wails of disenchantment are begrudgingly hopeful when all is sung and done. The combination of the spastic guitars, loopy keyboards and throbbing drumbeats draws you in and makes you listen. The Plan has a rhythm that's off somehow, but it doesn't matter, because we're all a bit off rhythm ourselves. Sometimes it's hard to imagine that this came out five years ago because the sound seems so fresh even now. This record is full of mix-tape must-haves like "What Do You Want Me To Say" (with the opening lines: "I lost my membership card to the human race / so don't forget the face because I know that I do belong here"); the story about loneliness told in "Spider In The Snow"; the subtly surprising "Your Are Invited" never cease to put smiles on faces.

CDs that I've burned for other people: Le Tigre, *This Island*; Two Gallants, *Throes*; William Shatner *Has Been*; The Unicorns, *Who Will Cut Our Hair When We're Gone?*; Mix Tape, *Numba One Awesomeness*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Agacki (DA)

Die Kreuzen, Cement. When I was in sixth grade, my uncle introduced me to Die Kreuzen by playing *Cement* for me. He passed away recently, so this album has been on my mind a lot lately. As a young, impressionable kid it was great to hear about a local band releasing albums. I know most people are thinking *Cement*? Really? Not *Cows And Beer* or *Die Kreuzen*? Nope, this one had the biggest impact on me. I've never heard another album like it. The songs are melodic and melancholy, but still intense. It's not metal, rock or punk. Die Kreuzen always did a great job of combining all those genres with other elements from all over the musical map. "Deep Space" is probably my favorite song on the album: It is, by far, the most mellow song on *Cement*. There are no wailing vocals, just clear singing. It ends perfectly with an (unlisted) acoustic version of "Gone Away," which is also a great song. They have a way of pulling off moody, acoustic songs that hit you hard. In my eyes, they ended their career as a band as strongly as they started. My favorite memory involving *Cement* is when I told Felix Havoc that I liked it as much as Die Kreuzen's first album. He answered, "Wow, you're a weird guy."

Radio, Radio: Nirvana, *With The Lights Out* (box set); Peter Case, live and all albums; Christian Death, *Only Theater Of Pain*; Townes Van Zandt, *High, Low And In Between*; Science Of Yabra, *Don't Panic*.

Can Joann – The Aiden Grace EP, CDEP

The EP started off with a driving pop feel that got me excited for the other three songs. Unfortunately, nothing followed but nondescript, hook-laden indie pop. I should have guessed; it's always a bad sign when 75 percent of an album's song titles are clichés ("Lady Luck," "Old & Grey," "Banner Year"). (LW)
Self-released, www.canjoann.com

Candy Band – More Candy, CD

Four Detroit riot mommies aim to make Barney obsolete with baby's first punk record. Candy Band turns "The Ants Go Marching" into combat rock, and other children's sing-alongs become parent-friendly shout-alongs. "Monsters," which mimics Metallica's "Master Of Puppets," and other clever originals definitely deserve heavy rotation in the Fisher-Price boombox. (JM)
Self-released, www.candyband.com

Carousal Shy – We Want To Be In Your Radio We Want To Be In Your Heart, CD

Do you know how much it sucks ass cheek when you think, after just a few seconds of a record, that you know exactly what you're in for? Oh, God, does that initial ugly thought hit here like a blindsided tackle. A sick "Machine-head/Everything Zen" guitar feedback starts the album, then...the skies open, and you recognize yourself for the bitch you are. Walker Lukens shares an emotional precocity and a hesitant warble with Conor Oberst that gives plenty of backbone to these big rock songs about love. He offers a good reminder about what happens when you assume things. (SM)
I Enjoy, 17402 Davenway, Houston, TX 77084, www.iEnjoyrecords.com

Casa Verde – Looking God In The Eye, CD

The first song on this CD immediately reminded me of the Buzzcocks. I think it's the interplay of the two guitars that follow the vocal melody. Anyway, I like it, and it's good to hear a band that can make technically complicated music with soul. I also thought of Elvis Costello and Simon and Garfunkel, but this band has its own unique sound, and I could compare them to other bands but still not be able to pinpoint them. An excellent release that demands another listen. (JJG)
Radioactive Bodega, 687 Park Place, Brooklyn NY 11216, www.radioactivebodega.com

Cashel, Kathy – The Question Is Yes, CD

At its core, *The Question Is Yes* is a predominantly acoustic, singer-songwriter venture; however, Cashel is a bit more experimental with her vocals and songwriting than others who typify the genre. Some of the more out-of-step elements work, others don't, but *The Question Is Yes* is more interesting of a listen because of them. (AJA)
Exotic Fever, PO Box 297, College Park, MD 20741, www.exoticfever.com

Cerberus Shoal – S/T, CDEP

Borrowing sounds from Hoover and Rodan, this band is after my heart. Both the opening and closing track on this six-song disc have the same theme, "Rain," which creates a sense of musical journey. A mystery track follows with another 30 minutes of sparse, yet intense guitar work. (DI)

North East Indie P.O. Box 222, Cape Elizabeth, ME 04107, www.northeastindie.com

Chance, The – S/T, CD

I bet if you saw these guys play at a warehouse or a bar or something, you would admire their spunk, because they have a really energetic sound, and they pack plenty of foot-tappin' hooks into each tune. But then they also sound like they probably wear costumes on stage. (DAL)
Red Stapler, 6903 Ridgedale Court, McLean, VA 22101-5105, www.redstaplerrecords.com

Channel, The – Personalized, CD

Will Oldham songs shouldn't harm records; however, the closing cover of Oldham's "Black" deflates *Personalized*. "Black" poorly complements the previous '60s-style pop tunes forming a fine concept album complete with segues and Brian Wilson arrangements and harmonies. Still good, but the band disappoints by denying listeners another fine original. (JM)
C-Side, www.c-siderecords.com

Character – We Also Create False Promises, CD

I really love these instrumental songs by this Nashville band. Produced by Roger Moutenot, owner of Fictitious Records, the sound is reminiscent of Tortoise and Lambchop, and mixes live performance with some special effects. (DI)
Fictitious, 74 The Arcade Nashville, TN 37219, www.fictitiousrecords.com

Chasm, The – The Spell Of Retribution, CD

So, a while back I was doing a one-off band with some friends here in Chicago. A few of the times we practiced, The Chasm was practicing next door. I had seen them play a few times before, but even through a wall I could tell that their songs sounded way better now. This CD is proof of that. Death metal leaning more toward the traditional side of things, *Retribution* is a great example of a band that's ready to make waves after toiling in the bowels of the underground and opening up for other bands. I could do without the constant echo on the vocals, but that's OK. The time is nigh to don your leather, bang your heads, metal brethren. Check this out if modern death metal has gotten too slick for your tastes. Oh, and one of the times I was at practice I saw a member of The Chasm in the hallway, and he was pretty nice. (DH)
Wicked World / Earache, Suites 1-3, Westminster Buildings, Theatre Square, Nottingham, NG1 6LG, UK, www.earache.com

Che: Chapter 127 – Martyrs For Monuments, CD

This female-fronted indie-rock band uses politically charged lyrics in a relatively solid effort. The music is driven by a meaty guitar sound, but the vocals lack variation and get too whiney. *Martyrs For Monuments* comes up average. (EH)
G7 Welcoming Committee, PO Box 27006, 360 Main St. Concourse, Winnipeg, MB R3C 4T3, Canada, www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Cipher System – Central Tunnel Eight, CD

Melodic, electronic-tinged metal. It reminds me a lot of Fear Factory, but minus the singing and with a slight Swedish feel. Underwhelming. (DH)
Lifeforce, PO Box 938, 09009 Chemnitz, Germany, www.lifeforcerecords.com

**Cleric – The Underling, CDEP**

Music this dense nearly requires a pickaxe for listening. The first song alone has enough tempo, time, and riff changes to fill some bands' albums. As far as labels, metalcore probably works best, but prepare to be challenged. (RR)
Self-released, www.clericmusic.com

Clockcleaner – The Hassler, CDEP

Listenable debut from this Philadelphia band. Six mostly short tracks of not-quite-hardcore fused with noise rock. On board: lots of angular guitar riffs, discordant flare, a solid, overwhelming rhythm section and vocals that sort of waver among singing, speaking and yelling. Better than expected. (TG)
Manic Ride, PO Box 42593, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.manicriderecords.com

Clyde Federal – Sensitive Skin / Please Be Real, 2xCDEP

Drawing on influences like Elvis Costello, The Jam, and Television, this band creates well-crafted pop-punk songs that bounce and jump. Slower songs, with pristine melodies, round out this excellent double EP. Without question, Clyde Federal has a good thing going. (MP)
Contraphonic, PO Box 2203, Chicago, IL 60690, www.contraphonic.com

Codeseven – Dancing Echoes / Dead Sounds, CD

I haven't heard the new Cure album, but this sounds like it could be it, minus Robert Smith's vocals. These guys play dreamy indie pop/rock with some soft accompaniments that occasionally sound straight off of *Disintegration*. Elements of new wave, shoegazer and British house music also make their way in here. (NS)
Equal Vision, PO Box 38202, Albany, NY 12203-8202, www.equalvision.com

☿ Cold Sweat – Blinded, CD

With a sound that comes straight out of *Damaged*-era Black Flag, Cold Sweat play aggressively pounding punk that makes you want to smash your head against the wall. Other bands might play faster or tune down lower, but few bands have this kind of raw energy. Vocalist Shaun screams with more rage than most of what passes for punk these days. Cold Sweat occasionally let the music get experimental, but not to the point of going over peoples' heads. So if you're looking for the missing link between *Damaged* and *My War* I would suggest you give this album a try. (SJ)
Manic Ride, PO Box 42593, Philadelphia, PA 19101, www.manicriderecords.com

Colin Spring & The Band That Murdered Silence – Cancion Del Pollo, CD

Included on this CD are 13 songs of Americana music in the vein of Canyon and Neil Young. It's refreshing to listen to something that isn't preprogrammed. It would make for a good night watching the band play live. (DI)
Self-released, PO Box 23236 Seattle WA 98102, www.murdersilence.com

☿ Collections Of Colonies Of Bees – Customer, CD

Come into the hive. Collections Of Colonies Of Bees have the acoustic sensibilities of Pullman or Town And Country underlain with exploratory percussion and electronic experimentations that mimic bird calls and insect symphonies. It makes for an excellent and intriguing mix of calm guitar melodies with chaotic noise and electronic chirps that aren't disruptive to the overall pleasant, early morning atmospherics. Formed in Milwaukee in 1998, this is the fourth major release coming from three members of the band Pele (Chris Rosenau, Jon Mueller and Jon Minor), plus the electronic handiwork of Jim Schoenecker. Pick up the Japanese

version, too, if you want a completely different version of the album from the U.S. release. (BA)
Polyvinyl, PO Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826-7140, www.polyvinylrecords.com

Colossal – Welcome The Problems, CD

An unconventional blend of indie rock and pop backed by an austere trumpet player and driven by intricate guitar interplay. At times the record is eerily similar to latter day Texas Is The Reason; other times it's unlike anything else out there. Eclectic, for sure, but also exciting. (BN)
Asian Man, PO Box 35585, Monte Sereno, CA 95030, www.asianmanrecords.com

Confederats, The – Runnin' From The Cops, CD

Songs about cops: check. Songs about beer: check. Songs about meat: check. Grotesque-cartoon cover art involving someone puking: check. Such a complete package of punk clichés is almost retro. Almost. (TG)
Piggyback Records, 60905 Jennings, Bend, OR 97702, www.piggybackrecords.com

Conversation, The – Blue, CD

Unremarkable acoustic pop in the vein of R.E.M. fills this album, where one song blends into another, thus making it seem twice as long. There's nothing particularly awful, but there's nothing particularly noteworthy. Skip it. (MP)
Dead Letter, PO Box 17882, St. Paul, MN 55117, www.deadletterrecords.com

Cotten, Jack – A Window Without Glass Is Just a Hole In The Wall, CD

The pared down folk songs on this album work best, and showcase Cotten's coy, sweetly meandering voice. He plays piano, guitar, harmonica, bass and every other instrument under the sun, which is the album's primary problem. There's too much going on here. Still, I'd like to see what he could do with a more focused, acoustic arrangement. (TG)
Moksha Kusa / self-released, www.jackcotten.com

Coyote Shivers – Gives It To Ya Twice, 2xCD

Two CDs of glossy, glam-inspired roadhouse bar-band rock from Coyote Shivers, who apparently is one person. Shivers sounds like he's making fun of himself with his cartoonish vocals, which is odd given the lofty ambition that must underlie a double album. One is acoustic. (DAL)
Foodchain Records, 6525 Sunset Blvd., Fourth Floor, Hollywood, CA 90028, www.foodchainrecords.com

☿ Cramps – Nazibilly Werwoelfen, CD

I bet you don't own the crazy 10" Cramps record that pretends to be a German bootleg. The one with funny renamed song titles on the back and the cover with Hitler himself may have kept you away; in fact, it looks horrible and who knows who bought the 1,000 pressed. This live concert is the best Cramps bootleg I now own. With eight tracks of power and craziness, this is the Cramps at their best in 1979. "Human Fly," "Teenage Werewolf" and "The Way I Walk" are my favorites on this one. Live broadcasts from the late '70s are rather hard to dig up from punk bands, but this one is from KFAT-FM, and I wonder how many heard it live. If you don't own many Cramps records, I feel sorry for you and would have a hard time telling you where to start. There are so many great ones. This is the best bootleg though, so don't buy any others first. (EA)
Road to Ruin Distribution, www.roadtoruin.distro.com

Cream Abdul Babar – Covering The Track Marks, CDEP

Five diligent, if unsurprising, readings of early 1990s indie tracks courtesy of this Florida noise-core group. The PJ Harvey cover drew my copy of *Rid Of Me* out of hiding, and I wonder who last borrowed my Jesus Lizard stuff. Otherwise, little original impact. (TS)
Under Radar, PO Box 1641, Seaford, NY 11783, www.underadar.com

Cribs, The – S/T, CD

Statistics: three piece. Home: UK. Style: Britpop with sing/speak vocals. Weight: I don't know. Color eyes: not sure. Influences: Jonathan Richman, The Strokes and Lush. Execution of album: Extremely mediocre. Afterthoughts: I ate vegetarian eggrolls while listening to this album. I wish this record ruled as much as they did. (RL)
Wichita, PO Box 27754, London E5 0FP, UK, www.wichita-recordings.com

Crimson Spectre – S/T, CD

Fast and loud proletarian-political hardcore-punk with a ghoulish, evil horror shtick. This is almost metal in the hard intensity of the delivery, but the insanely fast pace of the songs keeps this band in a great, angry hardcore/punk stasis. (MG)
Magic Bullet, 17 Argyle Hills Rd., Fredericksburg, VA 22405, www.magicbulletrecords.com

Crimson Sweet – Blood Transfusion, 7"

I reviewed their first full length record back in 2002 and this trio rocked it out then, and they continue to do so. This female-fronted troop sound even tougher this time around, even if it is a bit sloppier. Tough and kind of sexy, too. (DM)
Shake It, 4156 Hamilton Ave. Cincinnati, OH 45223, www.shakelrecords.com

Cryptics, The – Return Of The Magnificent Four, CD

Ten midtempo tracks of southern rock that never take off. We've heard this sound before, but you need a charismatic frontman to do the twang rock (i.e., Reverend Horton Heat). The band is tight and pull it all together nicely. The cliché lyrics fit the style, but unless someone else delivers them, then yhe Cryptics will stay mediocre. (EA)
Bare Knuckle Records, www.bareknucklerecords.com

☿ Cult Of Luna – Salvation, CD

Cult Of Luna is a band that never, ever would have been on Earache back in the good old days when the label was only putting out 100 percent kosher grindcore. That's not to say they're bad; they have a gloomy sound that sort of creeps up on you. Their songs start up slowly and meandering and eventually morph into trippy dirges with muted, downstroked guitar chugs and some dude screaming his guts out. Their execution is that of a doom-metal band who approaches the genre with a prog-rock aesthetic. All the songs are really long, but the shifts in sonic texture keep things semi-interesting. Heavy, weird and pretty original, if not totally satisfying. (AJ)
Earache, Second Floor, 43 West 38th St., New York, NY 10018, www.earache.com

Cunningham, Jeff – The Poems Stuck In My Teeth, CD

Jeff Cunningham's latest effort brings with it a traditional touch that's rare these days. No gimmicks, big production or grand schemes—just a heart on a sleeve, poignant words, clean melodies and conviction. The end result is both touching and thought-provoking, much like the heart-breaking opening track. (BN)
State Of Mind, PO Box 351, Port Jefferson, NY 11777, www.stateofmindrecordings.com

Dabentport – S/T, CD

Dabentport play sleepy, dreamy Americana that makes me think of cheap motels, lonely bars, overflowing ashtrays and Charles Bukowski stories. Then, out of nowhere, comes "Shotgun Cain" about James Brown's infamous joyride. Somehow it all makes sense. (SJ)
Fall Theory Sounds, PO Box 981341, Ypsilanti, MI 48198, www.falltheory.com

Danger, The – Sketches From A Small Room, CDEP

Popular enough to make it into video games, the Danger have the look

Reviewer Spotlight: Abbie Amadio (AJA)

Belle And Sebastian, If You're Feeling Sinister. If *You're Feeling Sinister* comes pretty close to perfect. On this album, Belle And Sebastian defy genre and time, loyal only to themselves and their matter-of-fact storytelling that is bonded by themes rather than any cohesive plot. Making such subjects as promiscuity, child flirtations with homosexuality and abuse sound either childishly innocent or devastating, B&S subtly deliver such topics with a juvenile folksiness. Paradoxical in their unassuming, sweet manner, undercurrents of loneliness, shyness, rejection and boredom run through each track. B&S passively, and in a tongue-in-cheek fashion, make the "sinister" acts normal, rather than the social norms and religious zealotry that tries to repress them. But aside from all the "mental masturbation," *If You're Feeling Sinister* is entirely comfortable musically, sounding as if every song was borne out of each respective band member's head. From the beautiful pop of "Mayfly" and "Get Me Away From Here, I'm Dying" to the ingrained lyrics of "If You're Feeling Sinister," "The Stars Of Track And Field," and "Me And The Major," an album can't get much better than this one.

Five CDs within arm's reach: Q And Not U, Power, Superchunk, *Cup Of Sand*, disc two; The Gossip, *Dead In NYC*; Sonic Youth, *Dirty*; David Thomas And Two Pale Boys, *18 Monkeys On A Dead Man's Chest*

and the sound that mainstream American youth may dig. But this is tougher to follow than their first full-length. If you like your punk long and midtempo, then you'll like this. Unless you're the Stooges, avoid seven-minute songs. (EA)

Self-released, www.thedanger.net

☛ **Dan Melchior's Broke Revue – Gud Bye Ta Sluggo!, CDEP**

This release has a couple of covers of '50s songs (Gene Vincent and R&B singer Little Willie John) and some other songs that have a rootsy rock flavor, like '50s rock and roll crossed with '60s garage rock. The press release made it clear that Dan Melchior's Broke Revue isn't trying to be a revival band, but instead a rock 'n' roll band that stands apart from the "hipper than thou post-punk aesthetics of NYC in 2004." I like this one; there are some skillful, but not overly indulgent, guitar solos and back-to-basics rock 'n' roll songwriting that isn't hip anyway. It has a direct lineage to the best rock 'n' roll from the past. (JGG)

Plastic, PO Box 1385 New York, NY 10156, plasticrecords@hotmail.com

☛ **Dangermen, The – Summer Of Danger, CD**

Australia's Dangermen play pure Detroit style rock 'n' roll as it was filtered through bands like Radio Birdman and the Saints. A big five-piece delivers 12 tracks that only suffer from the mastering. This disc didn't jump out like a great rock and roll record should. (EA)

Wild Eagle Records, PO Box 171, Sherwood, QLD, 4075, Australia, www.wildeaglerecords.com

☛ **Davidson, Ethan Daniel – Better Living Through Creative Selling, CDEP**

While the eclectic mix of neo-folk and heavy dub beats is certainly not bad, this EP is really more about the message than the music. Composed of six politically charged tracks, the socially conscious Davidson rants about terrorism, consumerism and foreign-policy hypocrisy without coming off too preachy. (LW)

Times Beach, 118 E. 7th St., Royal Oak, MI 48067, www.timebeachrecords.com

☛ **A Day In Black and White / Black Castle – split, CD**

Side A whips up the tempo and the noise assault step by step, so it's like climbing an art rock mountain where it's kind of overcast and sleepy at the bottom and then when you arrive at the summit a vulture pecks you to death. Side B is like that, too, but with a synthesizer. (DAL)

State of Mind, PO Box 351, Port Jefferson, NY 11777, www.stateofmindrecordings.com

☛ **Dead Hate The Living, The – Shock And Awe, CD**

These guys have found a way to update the hardcore sound without incorporating too many styles, getting bogged down by mosh parts, or sounding boring as a result. The music is raw and fast, but with some slight metal influences that only add to the strength of the songs. There aren't a lot of slow parts, only slower parts. But the songs are long enough to build up the intensity and provide memorable melodies. Two vocalists trade off duties with equal parts screaming and yelling. Their lyrics deal with rejection, despair and anger while trying to find meaning in it all. The song "Get In The

Van" is a nice wake-up call to bands that ruin a good thing by failing to communicate with each other. Song 12 is probably my favorite, though, with its catchy, almost pop-punk guitar part and the brief bass solo toward the end. (NS)

Hyperrealist, PO Box 9313, Savannah, GA 31412, www.hyperrealist.com

☛ **Deadsoil – The Venom Divine, CD**

Speedy hardcore with definitive thrash metal roots—the copious amounts of double kick and soul-crushing breakdowns don't hurt, either. There's a bit of singing here and there, but it's not a blatant cry for record sales, and their singer reminds me of Layne Staley (that's good). Trade in your Atreyu CD and buy this! (DH)

Lifeforce, PO Box 938, 09009 Chemnitz, Germany, www.lifeforcerecords.com

☛ **Dears, The – Protest, CDEP**

Murray Lightburn of The Dears knows that humanity is doomed. Thankfully, his next thought must have been to write the soundtrack to our bleak demise. Epic, haunting and ambitious, Protest is a three-part concept EP that makes listeners want to both destroy their failed society and then rebuild it anew. Broad in their scope, but universal in their appeal, The Dears have made a moving and insightful record that will inspire. Think *The Wall* meets Constellation Records played on the eve of World War III. Absolutely gorgeous. (MS)

Ace Fu, PO Box 552, New York, NY 10009, www.acefu.com

☛ **Defiance, Ohio / Ghost Mice – split, CD**

This is a lo-fi recording by a neo-folk college bands from Bloomington, Ind. There is a lot of acoustic music to dig through, but my favorite moment was the cover of the Gorilla Biscuits "Things We Say." The guitar parts are done by violin, and it sounds so great. (DI)

Plan-It-X, PO Box 3521, Bloomington, IN 47404, www.plan-it-x.com

☛ **Del Psychos – The Fajita Monologues, CD**

Del Psychos '60s-inspired psychedelic pop is upbeat and "boppy" rather than "groovy," and it may or may not be described as "jangly." All in all, their bare rhythms, destructible harmonies and lively songs are easy on the ears, but—gasp!—not all that memorable at record's close. (AJA)

Lightning Bug / self-released, 3149 West Argyle Street, #1, Chicago, IL 60625, www.delpsychos.com

☛ **Dennis Most & AudioLove – Live At The El Cid, December 1976, CD**

For those interested in cheery early punk, this recently rediscovered live recording of AudioLove is a real gem. Pink Floyd covers were never cool, not even in 1976, but most of the rest of this CD will be of interest to your average classic punk aficionado. (AE)

Captain Trip, 3-17-14 Minami-Koiwa, Edogawa-Ku, Tokyo, Japan, www.captaintrip.co.jp

☛ **Dennis Most And The Instigators – Vampire City, CD**

This German combo plays loud and fast punk with a big metal influence. The vocals are snotty and remind me of Joey Vindictive, which works well with this stuff. Fun, catchy songs that would make a great soundtrack for

speeding down the highway late at night in a big car. (JC)

Trash 2001, PO Box 10 16 53, D-46212 Bottrop, Germany, www.trash2001.de

☛ **Denver In Dallas – After Diego, CDEP/DVD**

Peppy guitars and an emo storyline about getting misty-eyed over a special-yet-bratty girl and later, seeing her bullet-ridden. Also included: a DVD of live videos, which fuse Weezer's "Buddy Holly" and Will Ferrell's Blue Oyster Cult skit from "Saturday Night Live"—though not on purpose. (TS)

ECA, 35 Wright St., Weymouth, MA 02190, www.ecarecords.com

☛ **Des_Ark / Bellafae – split, 7"**

Two North Carolina guitar-and-drums duos shake this vinyl like an irritable baby. Des_Ark is the more dangerous one—singing pretty, pausing and molesting a cruddy guitar chord. Bellafae's more nuanced approach could win over fans of Blonde Redhead and Denali with a vocalist who coos Gwen Stefani-like through blown speakers. (TS)

Exotic Fever, PO Box 297, College Park, MD 20741-0297, www.exoticfever.com

☛ **Destructo Swarmbots – The Mountain, CDEP**

Destructo Swarmbots' brilliant, dark noise follows the lead of compositions like Cabaret Voltaire in creating sinister soundscapes that are powerful enough to evoke images of insects tunneling through dirt, of the bodies decaying beneath them and the untold stories of the world's darkest corners. Essential for lovers of the new noise. (CC)

Public Guilt, www.publicguilt.com

☛ **Die Warzau – Convenience, CD**

Like dogs, electronic-music artists evolve exponentially with each calendar turn. That would put Chicago industrial duo Die Warzau's first record since 1995 about 156,093 years behind the times. Add another 140 for this otherwise well-recorded CD's token ballad, for which Trent Reznor and Color Me Badd would be equally embarrassed. (TS)

Pulseblack, 770 Lake-Cook Road, Deerfield, IL 60015, www.pulseblack.com

☛ **Disrespect – Justice In A Bag, 7"**

Political dirt punk has never been one of my favorites, and this is no different. These guys aren't too bad, but really need to work on vocal deliveries. I guess that's difficult with three vocalists trying to say a whole lot in a limited amount of time. I'd pass on this one. (DM)

Profane Existence, PO Box 8722 Minneapolis, MN 55408, www.profaneeexistence.com

☛ **Divorce – S/T, 7"**

Everything dirty comes from the South. I don't know if it's the humidity, grits or rural Alabama, but for a region with sparse urban centers, some grimey-ass shit comes out of its anus. Divorce were dark and deranged hardcore grind from their home of Athens, Ga. They've honed their songs to be brilliantly captivating and fail to fall into a repetitive rut. The production gives an eerie mechanical atmosphere that sounds like factories breaking and corroding. One harrowing vocalist accented with deep guttural growls, all over some bass heavy grind. I'm not kidding, but this sounds like junkies dying in an industrial wasteland—and that's great. (VC)

Tsunami, 231 Emery Mills Rd., Shapleigh, ME 04076, www.tsunamirecords.com

☛ **Reviewer Spotlight: Bill Angelbeck (BA)**

Uncle Tupelo, No Depression. Not often does an album have a magazine named after it, and many argue it laid the foundation for the alt-country scene. In any case, it is a prime album. Here were three guys from Belleville, Ill., just east of St. Louis, finding a way to merge their love of Gram Parsons with the Minutemen and pulling it off genuinely. Some songs barrel out full-bore with dissonant yet twangy chords, and others are more serene with the more careful picking of acoustic guitars, mandolin or pedal steel. Uncle Tupelo single-handedly cracked my resistance to anything resembling country. Upon first hearing them, I remember thinking that music never seemed to go so well with a pitcher of cheap beer, with lyrics like "Whiskey bottle before Jesus / not forever, just for now." It's the understandable remedy, or anodyne, for working on the "Factory Belt" or on the "Graveyard Shift," typical topics for a Tupelo song. It is certainly worth revisiting this original album in light of the split between Jay Farrar and Jeff Tweedy, the two main songwriters, into Son Volt and Wilco and their various side projects or solo outings. I get tired of reading revisionary history, suggesting that Tweedy's songs were the strongest. Sure, his stuff of late (*Yankee Hotel Foxtrot* or *Loose Fur*) has been superb, but a listen to *No Depression* shows that, while good, he was second hat to Jay Farrar back then. Put this on and open up a couple of beers.

Current soundtrack for the day to day: Tara Jane O'Neil, *You Sound, Reflect*; Kings Of Convenience, *Riot On An Empty Street*; Kptmichigan, *S/T*; Flying Saucer Attack, *Mirror*; reading Thomas Frank, *What's The Matter With Kansas?*

☛ **Reviewer Spotlight: Jay Castaldi (JC)**

Turbonegro, Apocalypse Dudes. Nowadays there seems to be a slight Turbonegro backlash that I think is mostly predicated on the "hype" surrounding the band. But when *Apocalypse Dudes* was released in the U.S. in 1999, right as the band was breaking up, they were largely unknown in this country. Between then and now their legend has grown mythic, branches of the band's gang-like fan club called Turbojugend have sprung up around the world, and there was the inevitable reunion tour and comeback album. *Apocalypse Dudes* justifies the hype, a motherfucker of an album mixing elements of punk, metal, and '70s glam rock with crafty tongue-in-cheek lyrics about asses and pizza. There's not a bad song on the record, but "Get It On," "Rendezvous With Anus," and "Good Head" are classics of epic proportion. *Apocalypse Dudes* is about as close to perfect as it gets.

Top five: The Shocks "Banned in the USA" 7"; The Minds, *Plastic Girls LP*; Gasoline Fight, *Useless Form Of Weaponry* CDEP; Destroy Everything, *No More Monkeys* CD; Final Solutions "Eye Don't Like You" 7".

**DJ/rupture – Special Gunpowder, CD**

DJ/rupture's debut ambitiously combines techno, reggae, afro-cuban and hip-hop beats, and although it offers some great guest vocalists (Sindhu Zagoren) it doesn't serve up any standout tracks. He's a skillful DJ with an undeniable range, but no true center. (CC)

Tigerbeat6, 3358 24th St., San Francisco, CA 94110, www.tigerbeat6.com

DJ Soundwave – Gangsta, 12"

DJ Soundwave digitally manipulates several speeches of George W. Bush against an electronic dance beat. This song is a powerful protest tool against a loathsome administration. (DI)

Self-released, www.giantrobotdestroysrepublicanparty.com

Dmonstrations – S/T, CD

Cool, spazzy post-punk/hc from this San Diego trio, with hyperactive and complex rhythms pinned down by brilliant shards of sharp guitar and screamy/squealy vocals. The short songs all pack in a lot of different parts to keep things interesting without wearing out their welcome. I'm into it. (JC)

Strictly Amateur Films, PO Box 1876, Aptos, CA 95001, www.strictlyamateurfilms.com

D.O.A. – Live Free Or Die, CD

I am not so sure I need another DOA disc, and no, this isn't their best yet. The early discs recently rereleased by Sudden Death are classics, but this CD is not. The 20 tracks go punk, ska, reggae and heavy rock, and they feel totally disconnected, except they all hate the man. I'm sure they still put on a great show, and the sound is good, but unless you own their first 44 releases, I am not so sure if you need the 45th. (EA)

Sudden Death, Cascades PO Box 43001, Burnaby, BC, V5G 3H0, Canada, www.suddendeath.com

Downtown – S/T, CD

Warm sounding computers! This is pure, plush electronic-shoegaze, with all the usual waves of distortion-drenched feedback, fuzzy guitars and cough-syrup-laden vocals. The solid production seamlessly blends pretty, swirling guitars with lush, electronic wankery. Nothing new, but a pretty good album. (TG)

Coup De Grace, 1471 Third Ave., #180, New York, NY 10028, www.coupdegrace.tv

Draw Blood – The Calm Before The Storm, CD

Reminiscent of Paint It Black and Kid Dynamite, but without their quality songwriting. The lyrics seemed a bit stupid at first glance, but the explanations included redeem them. The CD progressively gets better as well, so it's worth a listen. (TK)

Trash Art!, PO Box 725 Providence, RI 02901, www.soundandculture.com

Drowningman – Learn To Let It Go: The Demos, CD

Before coming into their own on Revelation and Hydrahead, Drowningman started here. This great-sounding release features previously unreleased tracks, their five-song demo (recorded three months into their career) and two post-Rev tunes. Even early in their career, Drowningman showed was a major presence of the newly forming "screamo"/metal/hXc crossover scene of the mid- to late '90s. Although definitely not as fast and lacking a sense of urgency in their later niche metal sound, they still deliver a passionate and in-your-face recording. They encompassed the emo sounds of metal, which definitely helped them build their strong fan base. I honestly forgot how good these guys were back in the day, before the well-tuned killing metal machine they later became. This release is also the welcome back after a short break up due to constant band line-up changes over the years. Glad to have you back, guys. (DM)

Reignition, 61 4th Ave #125 New York, NY 10003, www.lawofinertia.com/records

Reviewer Spotlight: Vincent Chung (VC)

Paintbox, Earthball Sports Tournament. Paintbox's 1999 full-length debut (*Singing Shouting Crying*) and two 7-inches proved that the ex-Deathside band could play hardcore with tasteful melodic overtones and still maintain lightning-speed riffage. While pages could be written of their older releases, I want to focus more on the mind-blowing follow-up. The pressures of expectation commonly curse the second album for most bands, but Paintbox's progressive sound only reaches new heights, raising the bar to the motherfucking moon. *Earthball Sports Tournament* maintains the catchy singalongs, epic metal guitar solos, and Filth-like vocals that dominate their aural assault—all played at the 100 mph high-energy fury that Japanese hardcore has established and cornered over its history. This time around, the songs lean toward melody than metal, and nonstandard instruments pepper the performance. (I've counted harmonica, acoustic guitars, string arrangements, handclaps, whistles, bongos, horns and even chirping birds.) The end result is a powerful, anthemic hardcore album that is merely a bookmark for a band that's taking giant leaps every step of the way. A big "Fuck you, you lucky dog!" to anyone who had a chance to witness Paintbox on their all too brief American tour last summer.

Better than armpit farts! Lost Sounds, S/T; Coughs, LP; Call The Police, LP; The Homosexual, CD; and John Reis' Midas Touch.

Dr. Killbot – Super Sonic Hellbeast, CD

The 13-year-old me would have really dug this: unrepentantly dorky electro-punk-ska, with everything from organ, accordion, juvenile skits and D&D references to the didgeridoo thrown in for good measure. And hey, they have a song about lycanthropy! (TG)

Self-released, www.drkillbot.com

Driver Of The Year – Statik, CD

This band takes in an admirable variety of influences and seems especially hopped up on a Roxy Music mixture of seductive keyboards and stealthy guitar, but nothing completely pulls together. Still, there are moments, notably during the opening track, when you think they just might pull it off. A good start. (TG)

Future Appletree, PO Box 191, Davenport, IA 52805, www.futureappletree.com

Ducky Boys, The – Three Chords And The Truth, CD

When vocalist Mark Lind delivers lyrics about relationships and personal lives at crossroads, his voice resembles a Mike Ness knockoff. Lind's voice adds another layer of sincerity—as if the earnest "Stand By Me" cover weren't enough—to The Ducky Boys' grown-up punk. Well done. (JM)

Thorp, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Dutch Elms – Music For Happiness, CD

Are you an Anglophile? Building a time machine to the '60s? Do you wish British troops armed with bouncy bass, staccato guitar and vocal harmonies would invade your hometown? Well, then, cheers to Dutch Elms for paying homage to Davies, McCartney, Townshend and other '60s blokes. Not bad at all. (JM)

Jigsaw, 757 N. 65th St., Seattle, WA 98103, www.indiepages.com/jigsaw

Early Day Miners – All Harm Ends Here, CD

Recorded in an old church on the outskirts of Bloomington, Ind., the recording apparently was haunted by ghosts causing unexpected sounds on the tapes, nearly stopping the project. The gothic Midwestern events became somewhat symbolic for the aims of the album, touching on the hopefulness that still persists despite darkness, death and other toils. The slightly orchestral instrumentation is the main aspect that provides the lightness as counterbalance, bringing a mellowness and levity with careful, slowcore pacing. The arpeggiated guitar chords also provide a mildly hypnotic element that pulls you into its tracks. The combination of melancholy and quiet optimism extends the feel of lonely Sunday evenings. (BA)

Secretly Canadian, 1499 West Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

Eason, Terry – Bees Will Bumble, CD

Like red states after the 2004 election, this rock record is all over the map. A solid guitar player, Eason handles power pop, bursts of post-punk, Americana and psychedelic rock. Some songs stumble, and at times, Eason's wordplay favors style over substance; however, the great tracks outnumber the questionable few. (JM)

Jam, 3424 Wedgewood Drive, Portage, MI 49024, www.jamrecordings.com

'89 Cubs, The – There Are Giants n the Earth, CD

This Omaha, Neb., band's effects-heavy yet guitar-based emo and alt-rock epics could have come straight out of the '90s. Although The '89 Cubs' starting lineup comprises members of The Good Life, Desaparecidos, and Bright Eyes, the group doesn't hit a home run with this debut. But it doesn't whiff either. (JM)

Slowdance, PO Box 11223, Portland, OR 97211, www.slowdance.com

Ends, The – Concrete Disappointment, CD

I liked the last record quite a bit, but I don't know about this one. It's

good, but their blending of Clash-style rock mixed DOA doesn't grab me this time around. Maybe it will grow on me. (DM)

Dirtnap, PO Box 21249 Seattle, WA 98111, www.dirtnaprecs.com

Eniac – Oh?, CD

Europe's answer to Les Savy Fav? Eniac blur the fine line between aggression and pretension, providing enough straight-up rock for the naysayers, but throwing in the new-school sass to make anyone with a Blood Brothers pin hunt for the band's hard-to-find European 7-inches. (MS)

X-Mist Records, PO Box 1545 72195 Nagold Germany www.x-mist.de

Ergs, The – Cotton Pickin' Minute, 7"

The Ergs are a cool bluegrass rock band that has the energy, skills and honesty to make you forget all those bad stereotypes of country music. Bonus points for the bubblegum-colored vinyl. (JG)

Prison Jazz, 431 Birch St., Scranton, PA 18505, www.prisonjazz.com

Eric Panic – Catharsis, CD

Tight, melodic punk in the vein of Face To Face with lyrics sung and written entirely in French. It's a nice glimpse into the Francophone scene developing north of our border. The opening track, "La Recreation," is the high point of the recording and worth hunting down as a single. (BN)

Union 2112, 78 Rachel East, Montreal, Quebec, H2W 1C6, Canada, www.unionlabelgroup.com

Escapado – S/T, 7"

This German band debuts a promising EP of epic hardcore jams. With harrowing vocals (think ACME) and frenzied music, this will turn some heads stateside. It's not without flaws; contrived, strained singing, and predictable mosh parts seem like distractions to what would be a great sound. (VC)

Zeitstraße, PO Box 2822, 24518 Neumünster, Germany, www.zeitstra.de; Alerta Antifascista, PO Box 2318, 24913 Flensburg, Germany, www.no-pasaran.org

Expectorated Sequence, The – Over The Top, CD

These guys are going to get compared endlessly to Daughters because of their insane tempo shifts and screaming, but they are way crazier and intense. Plus, they don't seem as sassy, which is good. Amazing comic book artwork, to boot. Seek this out if you like spazzy, screamy hardcore. (DH)

Contempt For Humanity, PO Box 463, Station C, Montreal, Quebec, H2L 4K4, Canada, www.cfthrec.com

Experimental Dental School – Hideous Dance Attack, CD

Experimental Dental School folds carnival-tromp-style keys into the buoyant noise of guitars and megaphone vocals. Somehow, it works for them when they're able to hold the song structure together, but when a track derails (which most of them do) it's excruciating. (CC)

X-Mist, PO Box 1545, 72195 Nagold, Germany, www.xmist.com

Faeries, The – Riot In The Hive Mind, CD

At times, the Faeries break out the grindcore. Others, they goof like Tourette's-aping lunatics. But the hissing *Riot In The Hive Mind* always returns to early Sub Pop dirges, which are detuned and disheveled and everything they should be. (TS)

Waking, 1803 Riverside Drive, Apartment 5M, New York, NY 10034, www.wakingrecords.com

Faithfull, Marianne – Before The Poison, CD

Melancholic and roughened, Faithfull's voice has deepened with age. She delivers the lyrics with a cynicism and realization of someone who truly knows her subject matter and has the luxury of sitting back and separating herself from it. Been there, done that. On the first listen, this connection between the songs and vocalist appears stronger than it actually is. PJ

Harvey wrote the majority of *Before The Poison*, with Faithfull co-writing

lyrics to two of Harvey's five credits. As well, Nick Cave provides the music to Faithfull's lyrics on three tracks. The styles of Cave and Harvey match the aged rudeness of Faithfull's vocals, notable in their bareness. Though the songwriting does rightly fit with Faithfull's mood, PJ Harvey's presence does sometimes overshadow the titled persona. In combination with Harvey's voice, such songs as "My Friends Have" and "No Child Of Mine" have a bittersweet tone that is more striking than Faithfull solo. (AJA)
Anti-, 2798 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.anti.com

Fallout 40 – Attain To A Calm, CDEP

Yet another slab of Rise Against-style melodic hardcore. This one stands out for its Queen harmonies on "Mass=This," anti-hegemony stance and the balls to pull it all off with a legit British accent—which we've always thought sounds kinda dignified. (TS)

You And Whose Army?, PO Box 34398, NW6 4XT, London, UK, www.yawarecords.com.

Fast Forward / T Cells – split, CD

Fast Forward gives you quirky, dark new wave that is bass driven. It has quiet, unpredictable vocals, accompanied by lo-fi noise and strident organ. Whereas T Cells gives you beat-oriented, noisy pop, filled with lo-fi electronic samples. This split is interesting and fun to listen to. (EH)

Three One G, PO Box 178262, San Diego, CA 92177, www.threoneg.com

Fat Day – Un! Un!, CD

This starts with a bad, Casio-esque solo that then leads into good, fast, frantic noise punk. This continues for a few tracks and then repeats several times over. I can see where the Blood Brothers and Reggie/Full Effect thing seems to be going, but the solo Casio shit needs to stop. (DM)

Load, PO Box 35, Providence, RI 02901, www.loadrecords.com

Fax Arcana – The Ritual In Routine, CD

If records had their own mottos, this one's would be "I ain't got time to brood." It's like a meandering goth opera that spouts darkness and doom, but with a gushing stream of new riffs and sections that ensure nothing gets sufficiently developed. (DAL)

Alone Records, PO Box 3019, Oswego, NY, 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Fax Arcana / The Disease – We, The Bankrupt, split CD

I always hate to play favorites in split reviews, but this time I'm plating my bets on Fax Arcana. Unlike the Disease, Fax Arcana's contributions are unique, not to mention their presentation of their material gives listeners much more to go on. Mixing an almost Scott Weiland-esque croon with some genuinely unique post-hardcore intricacies, Fax Arcana might not thrill the masses but they at least strive for something above the status quo. On the other hand, the Disease quickly fall off into Refused territory, muscling their way through a predictable mix of electronics, sampling and screeching. (MS)

Alone, PO Box 3019 Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Fear Before The March Of Flames – Art Damage, CD

Reviewer Spotlight: Carla Costa (CC)

Sonic Youth, Sister. I arrived at my best friend's house a few hours after it got there. She opened it up and laid it on the turntable. The drums kicked in first. They sounded almost tribal and echoed as if they were played from inside one of New York's vacant rotundas. I lay down on her pink carpet and started filling out a quiz in Sassy. Halfway through "Schizophrenia" she says, "This one's good, huh?" I don't answer till nearly 15 minutes later when "Pipeline/Kill Time" spins on. "It's amazing," I say, and she laughs. "You're totally in love with Lee's singing," she says, tossing me the liner notes just in time for the distorted chords that open "Tuff Gnarl." In the background, Kim's bass drives the melodies from the ground up. "Saints preserve us in hot young stuff / The saving grace is a sonic pig pile / Amazing grazing, strange and raging." Meanwhile, Thurston and Lee's guitars, split between speakers, have a musical conversation about the difference between love and lust. "Flies are flaring thru your brains / Spastic flailing literally raising my roof / An adrenal mental man-tool box / Explodes in music, creates utopia / You gnarl out my nerves / You weird and crush the cranking raunch." Spinning out in a whirl of Moog synthesizer, pushing into infinity through the drone of the frenzied feedback, Sonic Youth had created their first record of true compositions, symphonies of noise filled with rage, hope, fear and love. A manifestation of my brain's twisted paths and the first record ever to steal my heart.

A New Kind of Winter: Rogue Wave, *Out Of The Shadow*; Charles Mingus, *Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus, Mingus*; The Good Times Are Killing Me by Linda Barry; Glenn Branca, *Lesson #1*; My New York Diary by Julie Doucet.

Reviewer Spotlight: Art Ettinger (AE)

Fear, The Record. When I first saw *The Decline Of Western Civilization*, I was in the sixth grade and just getting into punk. All at once I heard a wide range of bands, but the film allowed me to see several of these bands in action. As the film progressed, some made more of an impression than others, with Circle Jerks and X standing out most of all until the end of the film, when Lee Ving and Fear are featured. Fear was punk rock: rude, despicable and confrontational in ways other types of rock music could only begin to aspire to. As soon as I could, I picked up their seminal debut album, *The Record*, and it's one of the few albums that actually gets better over time. From the opening track, "Let's Have A War," to its other classics ("I Don't Care About You," "I Love Livin' In the City," etc.), *The Record* is a barrage of hits. Unlike some other confrontational punk bands, the lyrics are clearly tongue in cheek and satirical. I understood the sarcasm in the sixth grade, but many grown-ups still can't seem to cope with Fear's popularity this many years later.

I'm boycotting the new Donnas record due to its lame classic rock-influenced cover art, but I can't get enough of these: ANTISEEN, *Bad Will Ambassadors*; ANTISEEN, *One Live Sonofabitch* (three-disc reissue with DVD); Caustic Christ, *Government Job*; MDC, *Magnus Dominus Corpius*; Hellstomper, *Fine... Forget It*.

Here's an impressively crushing album of metallic hardcore insanity with a slight injection of indie/screamo dynamics. Raw, complicated and heavy, like Converge meets the Blood Brothers (in a good way). (MG)
Equal Vision, PO Box 38202, Albany, NY 12203, www.equalvision.com

Felix Culpa, The – Commitment, CD

Of-tempos, side-by-side with personally apocalyptic lyrics, congregate with straining experimental guitar work that just swallows itself. More than occasionally the Culpa try too hard to be downtrodden sods with the weight of the world on their shoulders. You can almost feel your pulse slow. (SM)

Common Cloud, 2000 W. Addison #2, Chicago, IL 60618, www.commoncloud.com

Feverdream – Freeze! – CDEP

Feverdream play mathematical indie-rock with odd time signatures and embarrassing lyrics ("come shake hands with my Johnson" being just one example). It all seems more like an exercise in putting a bunch of weird riffs together instead of writing actual songs, and it's not very fun to listen to. (JC)

Coalition, Newtonstraat 212, 2656 KW Den Haag, The Netherlands, www.coalition-records.com

Fients, The – A Grave Beginning, CD

Psychobilly is rock 'n' roll's communism: great in theory, but horrible in actuality. Like capitalism, every band is as predictable as the next blood-sucking (no pun intended) Wal-Mart. *A Grave Beginning* is no exception. It's pure kitsch, with a somewhat above par fuzz guitar. (RL)

Sonic Swirl, PO Box 111202, Cleveland OH 44111

Fighting Chance – Partly Lies, 7"

Three-track single from this Baltimore street punk/oi outfit. If you like your punk fast, hard and laced with political lyrics, working-class pathos and sneering guitars, then this should work for you. Otherwise, nothing new here. (TG)
Insurgence, 2 Bloor St. W. Suite 100-184, Toronto, ON M4W 3E2, Canada, www.insurgence.net

Fighting Chance – Sacrifice And Struggle, CD

Run-of-the-mill street punk with a vocalist that lacked any real passion. The music was aggressive and fast-paced, but the vocalist wasn't really powerful enough to front a band like this and just sort of fell into the background. I also hate the monotone yelling trend in these bands. Pass. (KM)

Insurgence, 2 Bloor St. W. Suite 100-184, Toronto, ON M4W 3E2, Canada

Final Four – S/T, CD

Pretty straight-forward street punk from north of the border. All of the usual elements are here: clap-along melodies, sing-along choruses and energy enough to keep any party going all night. Grab a tall can and sing along. Fans of the Ducky Boys and Reducers SF, take notice. (BN)
Insurgence, 2 Bloor St. W. Suite 100-184, Toronto, Ont. M4W 3E2, Canada

Fingers-Cut, Megamachine – Color Tub, CD

Devon Williams takes the cynicism that made Osler so likeable to new heights

on this collection of 10 new, old, and rare recordings made with fellow Osler alumnus Dave Benitez. This acoustic lo-fi, low-budget, and "high on emotion" disc is likely the best material the duo have written to date. (BN)

Aggravated Music, PO Box 10699, Glendale, CA. 91209, www.aggravatedmusic.com

Firebird Band, The – The City At Night, CD

Stuck in between industrial and dance, the synth-heavy CD is mediocre at best. When there is a good song, "Dangerous" or "Fire," it drones on for too long. Also, the rap song was a very bad idea. This may have worked 10 years ago, but not today. (MP)

Bifocal Media, PO Box 50106, Raleigh, NC 27650-0106, www.bifocalmedia.com

Flapjacks, The – Move To Mars, CD

Rockin' rockabilly four-piece out of Portland. No big surprises, but the tunes are catchy, and the lyrics are witty. Booze, broods, and tacos. What else do ya need? (AJ)

Last Chance, PO Box 42396, Portland, OR 97242, lastchanceecs@excite.com

Flashlight Arcade – The Art Of Blacking Out, CD

The vocalist from the defunct hardcore band One40ne formed this Jersey-based group to play material that is more introspective and melodic than what East Coast core generally permits. The end result is a fascinating hodgepodge of meandering, slowly paced emotional punk, with aggressive breakdowns thrown in for nostalgia's sake. (AE)
On the Rise, PO Box 2471, Westfield, NJ 07091, www.otrecords.com

Fleshies – Gung Ho!, CD

This CD compiles a bunch of old 7-inches, compilation tracks and unreleased material, all remastered and given a new sheen. But can you really polish a turd? Well you sure can if that turd is from Oakland's punk-as-shit heroes, Fleshies. As you might expect, this material is a lot more raw and roughshod than their "proper" releases, but it only adds to their charm. These songs are drenched in feedback, distortion and 'tude (dude), but that grittiness really adds to their Black-Flag-by-way-of-Detroit sound. They even kind of cover a Stooges song with their delightful bastardization, "I Got A Bruise." My favorite song on here though is "Gonna Have To Pass," which is a flat-out, balls-out rocker that reminds me of the Didjits. Come get some. (NS)
Life Is Abuse, PO Box 20524, Oakland, CA 94620, www.lifelsabuse.com

Flickerstick – Tarantula, CD

These Texans were not entirely produced by television, but VH1's *Bands On The Run* winners have found the world on the other side of that glass screen to be as cruel as it's been to Diana DeGarmo. They're still unknown (or unwanted), writing and playing gassed-up testosterone tirades and saggy ballads like an Eve 6/Buckcherry collaborative effort. Brandin Lea sings about money, drugs, girls and dead-ends as if debauchery without interesting plot twists is all he knows. It works for a while, but we've already seen these pictures. (SM)

Idol, PO Box 720043, Dallas, TX 75372, www.idolrecords.com

**Flössin - Lead Singer, CD**

A trio of noise musicians create havoc through feedback, wails of guitar, laptop electronics and drumming that is loose, speedy, and ecstatic. Like a lot of improv, it could be "improved" through a more considered, less jammy approach. Still, it has its amazing moments when things really coalesce. (BA)
Ache, PO Box 138, 1001 W. Broadway #101, Vancouver, BC V6H 4E4, Canada, www.acherecords.com

Forced Reality - Unheard, Unreleased And Under the Boot, CD

No frills oi/street punk with driving guitars, sing-along choruses and enough raw energy to overcome the varying recording quality. Some of the tracks were culled from out-of-print 7-inches and compilations, while a handful are previously unreleased. A good final chapter for an oft-overlooked American oi band. (BN)
Thorp, PO Box 6786, Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

Forensics - Things To Do When You Should Be Dead Anyway, CD

Who says metal can't rock? Forensics rip it up and tear the genre to shreds. With song titles such as "When the Monkeys Clap, You Know You're Fucked" and "As Long As There's No Flipper Babies," you know you're in for something different than your average metal band. (SJ)
Magic Bullet, 17 Argyle Hills Drive, Fredericksburg, VA 22405, www.magicbulletrecords.com

Foster-Walker Complex, The - The Eleven-0-Three EP, CDEP

These guys obviously take song-crafting very seriously and draw from a wide range of genres including blues, bluegrass, funk, jazz, rock, psychedelia and even techno. In other words, this is a college jam band. One of the songs on this EP is called "Say Cheese." Indeed. (TG)
Self-released, www.thefosterwalkercomplex.com

4FT Fingers - A Cause for Concern, CD

These UK guys sound just like they're from Southern California, as they play driving, melodic punk rock with vocal harmonies, and gruff pop hooks. Unfortunately, most of these songs don't stand out, and this was kind of tedious listening. The musicianship is actually good, but nothing grabbed me. (KM)
Go-Kart, PO Box 20, Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012, www.gokartrecords.com

Four Marys, The - Sweet And Sour, CDEP

It sounds like the Four Marys have been listening to their fair share of Sonic Youth. But despite the obvious influence(s), The Four Marys combine fiery vocals and catchy melodies that result in some pretty good, simple and unpretentious rock songs. (AJA)
Self-released, thefourmarys@hotmail.com

Four Slicks, The - S/T, 7"

When your garage-punk band is named after drag-racing tires, you list the members' instruments and classic cars, and you sing about girls, cars, and booze, you have no choice but to record in mono. This French rock band apparently got the memo. (RR)
Self-released, www.fourslicks.com

14 Year Old Girls - Strategy Guide, CD

These kids bring us 268-bit-resolution electropop tracks about video games. Sample: "Tomb Raider / Tomb Raider / Such awful gameplay." I don't care either. (TS)
Retard Disco, PO Box 461163, Los Angeles, CA 90046, www.retarddisco.com

Foxtail - Chants, 7"

The signature hook on this Chicago trio's single "Chants" starts off like a rock anthem and then putters out into indie deconstruction, all in the

space of a few seconds. The result is the sense of grandeur and loss and confusion. Not bad for a sparse, lo-fi garage-rock tune. (DAL)
Carterco Records, PO Box 13031, Chicago, IL 60613, www.cartercorecords.com

Frog Eyes - The Folded Palm, CD

Frog Eyes' beautiful melody lines and the lush timbre of their sound serves as the backbone for the band's shifts between frenzied and dreamy. But the yowling, discordant vocals are a deal breaker. (CC)
Absolutely Kosher, 1412 10th St., Berkeley, CA 94710, www.absolutelykosher.com

Full Frontal Assault - The Universal Struggle, CD

From the guitar riffs to the vocals to the breakdowns, FFA follows the metal/hardcore formula perfectly, creating a CD that sounds like every other metal-infused hardcore band. I'll concede that they're tight and good at what they do, but it's just not innovative. (EH)
New Regard Media, PO Box 5706, Bellingham, WA 98227, www.newregardmedia.com

Fun - Szklarska Poreba, CD

This is like standing at the base of a mountain, mesmerized by the beauty of an avalanche's oncoming onslaught. This Finnish trio utilize angular slide guitar, oppressive rolling bass, and Albin-inspired barks for heavy post-punk action. Fans of meaty punk bands like Fourth Rotor must get their hands on this. (VC)
If Society, Jyväskyläntie 7 as 1, 00550 Helsinki, Finland, www.ifsociety.com

Funeral Diner - The Wicked EP, CDEP

Overly dramatic, long-winded instrumental deliveries that lead into quiet whispers and screamy stuff. If I were a bi-polar teenager listening to the Ebullition catalog and early emo/screamo stuff, I would be at home. (DM)
Alone, PO Box 3019 Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Furious Billy - Sleep, CD

Some songs on Sleep are reverbed out dreamy pop, which reminds me of the Jesus And Mary Chain or the Velvet Underground. Others sound like experimental math rock with some artsy flourishes. The singer's nasally singing style gets annoying, but the music isn't bad. (JJG)
Nungler Winslowe, PO Box 150671 Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.nunglerwinslowe.com

Gasoline Please - S/T, CD

So they were doing an up-tempo, free-form jam on the back of the tour bus when Dennis Hopper hijacked them and said the bus would explode if they quit, and now they're locked in a never-ending cycle of artcore noise onslaught! Some cool moments, especially when the guitars have a dialogue. (DAL)
Phantom Records, 5142 Towle Ct., San Diego, CA 92105, www.phantomrecords.com

Get-Outs, The - Get the Message, CD

A full-bore rattle of garage punk from Bristol UK that hits between the eyes, the teeth and the legs. There's attitude hitched into the side of these 13 tracks along with the same kind of sweet hair harmonies/backups that Def Leppard still get away with. This record sounds like sweat. (SM)
Avebury, www.aveburyrecords.com

Ghost To Falco - Torn Or Broken, Shadowed Or Dark, Cast Off All Doubts And Ride The Flame To Freedom, CDEP

Under the moniker of Ghost To Falco, Eric Crespo of Portland's Alarmists creates eccentric and eerily beautiful songs that bind themselves in warm, dredging melancholy and rise into explosions of ambient noisy chaos, before eventually feather-falling back into calamity. This is an impressive EP, thick with conviction, tragic and soothing. (BM)
Coletta Blue Records, www.colettablue.com

Ghoules - Reclaim The World, CD

This Scando-punk band hits all the right punk notes: energy, aggression, catchy songs, and smart, socially conscious lyrics. Their dense, guitar-heavy sound will pummel you into something or other. (RR)
Rockstar, Kurbrunnenstrasse 32-36, 52066 Aachen, Germany, www.rockstarrecords.de

Giant Drag - Lemona, CDEP

With their debut, the duo Giant Drag gives us their fuzzy, dirty rock. Lead singer and guitarist Annie Hardy has the perfect throaty delivery for these rough songs. The songs are infectious and leave you wanting more. I think The Jesus And Mary Chain would be proud. (MP)
Self-released, www.giantdrag.com

Givens, Daniel - Dayclear & First Dark, CD

Givens, a New York-based poet and MC, presents his some inventive work with mostly spoken word vocals with dark DJ electronica. It's not all solid and can seem overly long, but when it works, it's smooth. (BA)
Aesthetics, PO Box 82233, Portland, OR 97282, www.aesthetics-usa.com

Glasses, The - S/T, CD

This is a delightfully pleasant pop debut with a jangly Britpop slant. If anything, it's too self-consciously geeky, as the band references the bible in a song about girls. Yet the beach-party riff makes up for it, and later on there's also a tune about a computer with feelings, which earns few points. (TM)
Double Dos, PO Box 4503 Seattle, WA 98194 www.doubledos.com

Glass & Ashes - Aesthetic Arrest, CD

Crazy fucking hardcore with a little melody here and there just to make things harder on reviewers. Think Planes Mistaken For Stars, but with a more pronounced DC influence: discordant guitars, screams, aggressive tunes and an underlying sense of melody to tie it all together. (BN)
No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

Gods Among Men - S/T, CD

I guess you could call this hardcore. Math time: Lots of fucking around on instruments + terrible, terrible singing + mediocre screaming + multiple songs over five minutes = bad news. Attention! Opening your record with an eight-minute song is a horrible idea! Avoid. (DH)
Sardonic Sounds, www.sardonicssounds.com

Gold Chains And Sue Cie - When The World Was Our Friend, CD

On his second full-length, Gold Chains has seemingly found his niche. Steering away from the jagged and often ironic cliché avant-garde hip hop of his previous work, *When The World Was Our Friend* is refreshingly original and fluidic in its house-hop-synth-pop-soul penchants. While the aforementioned style combination could very easily become a disaster, Gold Chains, quite possibly aided by his experience as a producer, has melded his influences into a seamless and lavish sound. He's accompanied by long-time collaborator Sue Cie, and the duo's voices complement each other wonderfully, playing back and forth in turbulent relationship-themed lyrics. Thick in its body capturing shifting dance beats, addictive choruses and Nintendo-esque Casio echoes, Gold Chains' sophomore triumph is an expansive record that should satisfy the tastes of a diverse and vast crowd. (BM)
Kill Rock Stars, 120 N.E. State Ave #418, Olympia, WA, 9850, www.killrockstars.com

Golden Virgins, The - Songs Of Praise, CD

For the most part, the beginning of this album is not bad, just uneventful. The Golden Virgins seem like so many other bands trying

Reviewer Spotlight: Melissa Geils (MG)

ESG, *A South Bronx Story*. A fucking classic band in the greatest sense of the word, ESG has become a huge influence to hundreds of popular and underground acts, and even if you've never listened to them, you might recognize at least one of their songs, as they have been sampled countless times in the rap/hip-hop world. ESG sprung onto the New York City scene in the late 1970s, then consisting of three young South Bronx sisters and a neighborhood friend on bongos. Their self-taught, minimal, dance-funk style immediately caught on in both the NYC no-wave and British Factory Records undergrounds as they released records on the Factory and 99 labels and played shows with the likes of The Clash, Grandmaster Flash, A Certain Ratio, Gang Of Four and PiL. Their music also paved the way to house music and hip hop. This comp album collects all of their early (and very out of print) tracks as well as tracks from a 1991 indie release (which is just as fantastic as their early work). Rhythm was always the main factor in their sound, and their DIY approach to making music is clearly evident. The first three songs on this collection ("You're No Good," "Moody" and "UFO") are definitely my favorites, as it is ESG in their most primal and rhythmic essence. They're worth checking out at least for their sparse yet funk-filled arrangements. Other must-listen tracks are "My Love For You," "Dance" and "Erase You." Essential listening!

Can't stop listening to: Solvent, Apples & Synthesizers; Lesbians On Ecstasy, S/T; Frog Eyes, *The Folded Palm*; Nick Cave, *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre Of Orpheus*; Cristina reissues on Ze Records.

to resurrect Duran Duran, skinny ties and synthesizers. Then on track eight, "Renaissance Kid," the band takes off by dropping the new-wave act and pretending to be Superdrag, doing so in a fantastic manner. The final four tracks are mellow and more acoustic, and they do it well. "We'll Never Be Friends" is a cheeky, slowly strumming number that sounds like it could be an Oasis song. This shift in style makes it seem like the album was done by two different bands. Despite the dichotomy, I like this album, but it's only for the strength of the last half. (MP)

XL, 1 Codrington Mews, London, W11 2EH, UK, www.xirecordings.com

Good Fight, The – Breathing Room, CDEP

Their onesheet says, "These bruisers are so hard that there's hardly any core left." It may be hard, but this is not even nearly the hardest band I have even heard this month. Maybe their upcoming LP will be tougher. (EA)

Good Fellow, 22 Wilson St., Hamilton, ON L8R 1C5, Canada, www.goodfellowrecords.com

Grails – Red Light, CD

Out of Portland, Ore., Grails release their second album of powerful instrumentals on the label headed by the band Neurosis. Though just a five-piece band, they are able to attain a symphonic quality. There are two guitarists, a violinist, bassist and pianist, and one versatile drummer who is pounding and precise. This evokes moods perfect for a long drive, which would be time enough to just sit and focus on the intricacies of the album and sink into its contemplative soundscape. Perhaps the best comparison would be the feel and intensity of the Dirty Three, though Grails emit even darker overtones. (BA)

Neurot, PO Box 410209, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.neurotrecords.com

Great Clearing Off, The – In Flight From The Terror Behind, CDEP

You get six songs of aggressive, high-energy punk rock taken from the screamo sound with hints of the Blood Brothers, but not yet at their level. This is really decent stuff if you dig the style. (DM)

Ed Walters, 11 S. 43rd St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-2901, www.edwaltersrecords.org

Great Unknowns, The – Presenting The Great Unknowns, CD

Rootsy country-rock-lite. Think the Black Crowes in their hippie daze. Vocalist Becky Warren has a pleasant, throaty voice. Pleasant music. Yeah, "pleasant" is the operative word here. "Pleasant" but not "thrilling." (AJ)

Daemon, PO Box 1207, Decatur, GA 30031, www.daemonrecords.com

Green Pajamas, The – Ten White Stones, CD

Now I'm certainly not a leading authority on psychedelic pop, but Ten White Stones comes awfully close to sounding like a modern day version of Spinal Tap's "Listen To The Flower People." Other times it reminds me of a folksier Fleetwood Mac, just as painful, but also far less amusing. (MS)

Hidden Agenda, 303 West Griggs Street, Urbana IL 61801, www.parasol.com

Greenlight The Bombers – American Executive, CDEP

It's reassuring when a band can take the usual post-punk tools and still construct a compelling sound. Greenlight The Bombers manages just that. Fugazi is the most obvious antecedent (although maybe that's just

the vocals), but that sound's been stripped down a bit and made meaner and harder. (RR)

Pencil Neck / self-released, www.greenlightthebombers.com

Grimble Grumble – Leaves Leader, CD

These guys even practice with the fog machine on. Grimble Grumble crank out psych-rock dirges heavy on layers of guitars. Christine Garcia's voice is like a candle in the winds, helping to raise the band above the fray of space-rock mediocrity and keeping us from digging out Bardo Pond instead. (BA)

Pehr Label, 6546 Hollywood Blvd, Ste 201, Los Angeles, CA 90028, www.pehrlabel.com

Grudges, The – S/T, 7"

No-frills punk with elements of both melodicore and hardcore. Rapid-fire drumming, frenzied guitars and screamed/yelled vocals make this a raw and dogged effort. The energy and aggression is present in abundance, which makes the band's technical shortcomings and sloppy delivery somewhat less noticeable. There's potential here. (BN)

Delta Pop Music, 663 S. Bernardo Ave. Suite 113, Sunnyvale, CA 94087, www.deltapop.com

Guys, The – S/T, CD

Major genre spoofing by this hilariously weird, kitschy, lo-fi rock 'n' roll/pop/dance/country/punk band. Despite the utterly muffled recording, this record is sorta fun and catchy and well humored, especially in the "Blue Acoustic" folk spoof and the fucking weird Devo-meets-James-Brown disco funk track "Loveswitch." (MG)

Friendship, www.friendshiprecords.net

Hateful – Reasons To Be Hateful, CD

This three-piece oi/punk band draws heavily from The Clash and Stiff Little Fingers crowd, but their "anthems" sound sophomoric compared to their influences. The music and recording are top-notch, and maybe with a different lyrics this would be better. Twelve tracks that hate the establishment, one repeating chorus at a time. (EA)

Rebellion Records Holland, www.rebellionrecords.nl

Headache City – S/T, 7"

New wave here, new wave there, new wave everywhere. Let me tell you, though, that this isn't the '80s synth pop that the Epoxies play. We have something different, something hard to pin down. It totally has the late '70s to early '80s tempo and song structure. You could say the Stranglers and other bands of that era, but I just don't feel comfortable with those comparisons. Shit Sandwich has a handful of great singles, and Headache City is a three-song slab of heaven. I have been playing this one over and over and still haven't quite figured out what makes it so right. Take out the keys and this is a lost punk classic; throw them in, and you have a new hit. (EA)

Shit Sandwich Records, 3107 N. Rockwell, Chicago, IL 60618, www.shitsandwichrecords.com

Headlights – The Enemies, CDEP

Where do I start? This four-song EP is fantastic. It starts off with "Tokyo," a lush, orchestral pop piece, which features male and female vocals that complement each other perfectly. "Centuries" is an up-tempo pop song that races and chugs along to the beat of a steady drum. The third

song, "Everybody Needs A Fence To Lean On" begins in a lo-fi manner, reminiscent of Belle & Sebastian, before taking off and making everyone from Elephant 6 proud. Finishing out the EP is the new-wave styling of "It Isn't Easy To Live That Well." In four songs, Headlights cover a lot of ground, but they never get lost. Instead they show the promise and potential they have. If this is what they can do on an EP, I must hear the full-length. (MP)

Polyvinyl, PO Box 7140 Champaign, IL 61826, www.polyvinylrecords.com

Heading South – Last Car Outta Richville, CDEP

Shedding teenage naivete, these young Danish punks confront issues of broad and narrow scope. And Heading South communicates through its instruments more than its lyrics. For instance, double bass drums double the angst. That willingness to shut up and play speedy punk is a promising asset. Not bad. (JM)

Self-released, www.headingsouth.dk

Heavenly States, The – S/T, CDEP

Convince your friends this is Dave Grohl's anti-Bush side project. The way-upfront hooks are there on "King Epiphany," which appears in two versions to spout slogans we've heard before: "Terror is a tease / got me on my knees." The disc's other track, "Monument," is a recitation of Iraqi war dead. (TS)

Baria, Locked Bag 10001, Capalaba BC QLD 4157, Australia, www.bariarecords.com

Hell's House Band – Dozen Lies, CD

At first, I wondered why such a boring modern-rock band would bother sending this in, but then I realized Kenny Lyon (Lemonheads), Mark Curry, and NOFX's El Hefe play in the band. I put Dozen Lies back on and continued to marvel at how awful it was. Please play these songs on the radio! (MS)

Hard Soul, 701 E. Third St., Suite 315, Los Angeles, CA 90013, www.hardsoulrecords.com

Hercules – In The Alleyway, CD

In The Alleyway is a very prettily assembled album of both happily bizarre and whimsical chamber pop. There is a dizziness to the music and a tongue-in-cheek sweetness to the lyrics that uphold the album despite its languid midpoint slump. Despite this sag, with songs such as the capricious "Hurricane" and the instrumental disorder/order of "City Slicker," the record's beginning and end keep things from unraveling completely while adding new twists. The later songs ("Me Against The World," "Let's Go Out") sound as if they were taken from some quirky film soundtrack, whetted with nostalgia. (AJA)

March, 562 Seventh St., #14, Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.marchrecords.com

Hermosa Drive – Anomaly, CDEP

I was immediately enamored by the long, sweeping piano intro (yo, chicks are into that shit). This is a spectacular metal-hardcore-emo band that are more metal than anything. A lot of "Gothenburg sound" stuff going on (At The Gates, anyone?); classic heavy metal sounds overlaid with screamed vox and some majorly melodic breakdowns. (MG)

Grave 9, PO Box 27577, Tempe, AZ 85285, www.grave9.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Tara Goe (TG)

Swell Maps, A Trip to Marinville. I love found albums. These are albums that have been around for awhile, under your radar, and when you finally hear them they're like instant friends, people you've known forever. Such was the case when I first met the Swell Maps about a year ago. The band formed in 1972 as six kids in their early teens calling themselves Sacred Mushroom, but they never actually recorded until 1977. No other band from the time probably considered the puppet shows *Thunderbirds* and *Stingray* as equal influences to Can, T. Rex and the Beach Boys. But this, of course, is why they're so wonderful. They only recorded two albums, and on *A Trip to Marinville*, their first and more accessible album, they incorporate everything from surf and industrial to found object instrumentals (using vacuum cleaners, biscuit tins, telephone books, boxes and the like.) The crazy instrumentation is complicated further by the all-over-me drum beats of Epic Soundtracks, and the nasty snarl of front man Nikki Sudden. The resulting assault is totally manic, chaotic and overwhelming—just the kind of music I want to hang out with when I haven't slept in four days. Nothing else from the post-punk era sounds quite like this. I think I've made a new best friend.

Other recently found/forgotten items: Elizabeth Cotten, *Freight Train*; Sonic Youth, *Daydream Nation*; The Gories, *I Know You Fine, But How You Doin'*; Brian Eno, *Here Come the Warm Jets*; Thee Headcoats, *Beached Ears*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Jason Gooder (JGG)

The Gits, *Enter The Conquering Chicken*. I can remember walking down Pike Street in Seattle, at about 12th, and seeing a film crew outside of the club known as Moe's. I asked one of the crew people what was going on, and he told me that they were filming an episode of *Unsolved Mysteries* about the singer Mia Zapata's death. They were recreating a Seattle concert from the early '90s. The Gits were a band that still had their best music ahead of them when Mia Zapata was killed after leaving the Comet Tavern. *Enter The Conquering Chicken* is a collection of poppy rock songs, folksy acoustic ballads, fast metallic punk and some other odds and ends, including an instrumental and a live acoustic track. This album showed that The Gits could play more than just punk rock: the cover of "A Change Is Gonna Come" is slow and bluesy, but as powerful as any of their faster songs. In some ways she seemed like a modern Janis Joplin; Mia wore her heart on her sleeve and could belt out songs in a way that was purely soulful and unaffected.

What I'm Listening To: The Gits, *Enter The Conquering Chicken*; Howlin' Wolf, *His Best*; Sonic Reducer on KEXP; Jimi Hendrix, *Rainbow Bridge*; Tom Waits, *Frank's Wild Years*.

**Hexe, Ron – Rebirth Is A Nightmare, CD**

There's something very creepy about a guy strumming an acoustic guitar and singing about cannibalism, kinda Charles Manson-ish, actually. Ron Hexe sings songs like "Abracadaver" and "Kill Me," the most macabre suicide song I have ever heard. (SJ)

Self-released, PO Box 263, Yarmouthport, MA 02675

Hi-Fi Massacre, The – Disarm The Humans, CD

Heavy hardcore with some rock influence. Reminds me of Turmoil at times, but more like later era Since By Man with all of the guitar noodling. Not bad, but you've heard it before. (DH)

Red Etiquette, PO Box 191321, Boise, ID 83719-1321, www.redetiquette.com

Hidden Hand – Mother, Teacher, Destroyer, CD

This CD was produced by J. Robbins of Jawbox fame, but it's a pretty heavy-metal-sounding disc. It seems like I spend too much time writing about members of Hidden Hand, but there is good reason. So much has been written about the "DC sound," but these musicians transcend all the fallacies surrounding that mysterious place. The lyrics are political, even when there are no vocals. "The Deprogramming Of Tom DeLay" would make any reprimand or hearing before the House Ethics Committee for this Texan a Sunday stroll around Malcolm X Park. Bass drums begin pounding as a gong crashes while feedback pulsates in the background for two minutes. Next begins 60 seconds of slow, gut-wrenching riffs that would tear his innards outwards. The last 31 seconds culminate with the more feedback that ends abruptly, proving the operation a success. Don't worry; the pain won't be long, but you wish it had been. Another favorite is "Travesty As Usual," which is a mixture of low, deep heavy bass and drums with the guitar and vocals sounding as if they were recorded in a spaceship. (DI)

Southern Lord, PO Box 291967, Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.southernlord.com

Hirameka Hi-Fi – Sprezzatura, CD

The record is strongest when it's softest, like on the title track, an arpeggio instrumental number, or when it's downright strange, like on "Czech Neck," where he groans "I'm sorry! Sorry! Sorry! I really am!" There are lots of good musical ideas, but they don't all mesh perfectly. (DAL)

Gringo, PO Box 3904, Clacton On Sea, Essex, CO15 5YF, UK, www.diskant.net/gringo

Hit & Run – Don't Fuck With Me, CD

A couple street punks, two thrash guys and a skinhead, all seemingly influenced by street punk and oi come together. It reminds me of the mid-'90s Southern California band Corrupted Ideals. They move me more than most similar bands. They look young, so if these guys get better with age, watch out. (DA)

Longshot Music, PO Box 302 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211 www.longshotmusic.com

Hopesfall – A Types, CD

This is the third release for this highly popular melodic hardcore band, but the first time I've had the pleasure of hearing them. I expected some typical emo-punk shit, but what this really is annoyingly pretty hard rock catching the tail end of this emo-punk craze. I understand the teenybopper appeal, but ugh. (MG)

Trustkill, 23 Farm Edge Lane, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724, www.trustkill.com

Hostage Heart, The – Where There Is Despair, Hope, CDEP

Totally great chaotic metal that's more controlled than it lets on. Overall, these guys are pretty technical and have a certain amount of catchiness if you look past the insane noise that doesn't seem to ever let up. Fuck, I wish more bands were this good—definitely the sleeper of this batch. How can you go wrong with a title like "I Liked

Them Better When They Were Local?" The vocals range from all-out screaming to my favorite: the death growl. Speaking of which, the vocals don't seem to be studio-manipulated for a more polished feel, which I love. The drums are totally triggered, though, which sucks for this kind of band. The looser the feel, the better. I realize that the bass drums need to be prevalent, but that sound can be attained without computers. Guitars and bass blend nicely into the mix, creating a package that even Ebert would have to give a thumbs up. Can't wait for a full-length! (DH)

Five Point, PO Box 230026, New York, NY 10023, www.fivepointrecords.com

Hot Like (A) Robot – Hurry Up And Die, CD

The musical equivalent of a Rubik's Cube, with the guitars going in multiple directions at once, chunking and strafing and raining metallic shards all over the floor. There are flashes of musical inspiration, but they are muted by grunting vocals that turn crescendos into cartoons. (DAL)

Criterion Records, www.criterionrecords.com

Hudson, Mike – Unmedicated, CD

The onetime vocalist for forgotten '70s Cleveland garage act the Pagans resurfaces. Recorded over a six-year period of reported heavy drinking, the album features old-school guests from the Dead Boys and Styrenes, and plays like a lost LP from 1977. Not as strong as some Pagans reissues, but it works well with a six-pack. (TM)

Sonic Swirl, PO Box 111020 Cleveland, OH 44111, www.sonicswirlrecords.com

Huge Rat Attacks – Montana, CD

This record gives you repetitive, uninteresting indie rock that lacks focus. HRA has simplistic song structure accompanied by weak male vocals. Nothing stands out as exceptional, and songs seem to run together. Overall unimpressive. (EH)

Self-released, www.hugeratattacks.com

Hugs – The Tarpit, CD

Slow, rhythm-heavy political "screamo" hardcore with a slight r'n'r swagger. Very much like early Blood Brothers but less spazzy. Good Stuff. (MG)

Waking, 1803 Riverside Dr., SM, New York, NY 10034, www.wakingrecords.com

Hunches, The – Fuck Disco Beats, 7"

The Hunches show what a noisy band should be by taking noise and wrapping it around well-crafted pop songs. They can play their instruments better than other bands who create this much racket. The Hunches have released many great releases, and here's another: The two songs on side A are layered with so many guitar sounds it's hard to figure out how many tracks were used; side B is a bit slower. The Hunches allow you to breathe slightly in between the chorus and the next verse, if you give them the chance. For a brief moment, they reminded me of a band that happened after Born Against, but before the Young Pioneers. The Hunches are best in small doses, than on a full-length release. (EA)

In The Red Records, PO Box 50777, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheheardrecords.com

Hurricane Lamps, The – More, More, More, CD

This album was obviously recorded with much care; the tracks sound great and pay strong attention to detail. On their fifth record, The Hurricane Lamps sound proficient and tight, but their knowledge of pop music make this record too full of hooks and tricks. They may have used them all. (EA)

Sonic Boomerang Records, 11200 Markwood Dr., Silver Springs, MD 20902, www.sonic-boomerangrecords.com

Instilled – Unfinished Business, CDEP

Think Modern Life Is War, but less epic-sounding. "To My Cellmate Revised" opens the EP up well, building up for awhile and then kicking out

the jams. I really like the fact that they actually have fast parts to go along with the mosh parts. Too many bands just fall flat because they lack variation. Usually it's all slow to midpaced, no fast. There are fast parts aplenty on *Unfinished Business*, and they definitely help my verdict. At first it's vaguely generic, slickly produced sound turned me off. Blah blah blah, it's good. I'm sure tons of kids will love this. (DA)

State Of Mind, PO Box 351, Port Jefferson, NY 11777 www.stateofmindrecordings.com

Insurgent, The – It Will Be That Sound, CD

This 21-track retrospective covers The Insurgent's six years together, and it saddens me that I never saw these guys. Opener "Restless" is a blazing track reminiscent of Cap'n Jazz's best moments. This is rockin' melodic punk with some mid-'90s emotore sensibilities; it's rough, but it's catchy with nice power. The vocals are definitely weak and tend to falter (again, just like Cap'n Jazz), but that vocal style has always suited this kind of music. It reinforces its "everyman" feel, like these are people just playing passionate music about the things that inspire them. It's the overall experience that's important here, not nit-picking things like "the vocals falter at the 1:50 mark in 'Offering.'" Let those things go, and chances are you'll find *It Will Be That Sound* an enjoyable listen. The extensive liner notes that detail the band's history are surprisingly well-written and insightful; in telling the story of The Insurgent, they tell the story of many other unknown bands who sacrifice almost everything for their music. One anecdote recalls running out of gas in downtown LA: "There were a thousand nights like that: stupid and absurdly perfect." This record is an elegy for every band that's done the same. (KR)

Dare To Care, www.daretocarerecords.com; Square Of Opposition, www.geocities.com/squareofopposition

Intent – Double Positive, CD

I really enjoyed listening to these late-'80s/early '90s American hardcore songs. Who'd have thought the English could pull off such ferocious guitars and pounding drums? The CD also includes some live tracks. (DI)

Suspect Device, PO Box 295, Southampton, SO17 1LW, UK, www.suspectdevicehq.co.uk

It Dies Today – The Caitiff Choir, CD

Metacore that tries to fool you with a pretty cool leadoff cut that just segues into a song with singing. According to their onesheet, they have all of the best elements of Killswitch Engage, Thrice and Eighteen Visions—so why someone wouldn't just listen to those bands instead is beyond me. Oh, maybe it's because they're all terrible offshoots of a popular trend that is becoming more watered down by the second. Or maybe it's the fact that bands like It Dies Today are perfect representations of everything that's wrong with the hardcore and metal scenes today: "aggressive" bands that tone it down just enough so that teenagers can buy it without fear of rebelling too hard and getting grounded. I can't wait for metal to be unpopular again. This record is completely horrible. (DH)

Trustkill, 23 Farm Edge Lane, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724, www.trustkill.com

Jabbers, The – American Standard, CD

New Hampshire isn't famous for much punk-wise, but it is where GG Allin is buried and home of the Queers. The return of GG's first well-known band mixes those two phenomena, because the reunited Jabbers recruited the original legendary singer of The Queers, Wimpy, to sing for them. I had the pleasure of seeing the reformed Jabbers live three times so far, and I can vouch that this album does them justice. The shows were a blast, mixing old GG-era Jabbers songs with new songs and some select early Queers material. This album, consisting mainly of new originals, is a hoot that fans of '77 punk and sleazy '80s punk won't want to miss. The lyrics are imaginative and humorous, and the band shows that old folks can in

Reviewer Spotlight: Emily Hausman (EH)

NWA, Straight Outta Compton. It's the undisputed heavyweight champion of gangsta rap. For my generation and those older than me, this was an important album and should be for everyone who likes rap. Not only did it put West Coast rap on the map, but NWA featured three of the most important rappers of all time: Eazy-E, Ice Cube, and Dr. Dre. This album was one of the first rap albums to hit the suburbs (and it's a staple in many tour vans); it didn't matter if you were a metal kid, a punk kid or hip-hop kid, you knew the words to this record. I remember listening to it tape in my Walkman so my mom wouldn't hear the lyrics. *Straight Outta Compton* delivers raw beats and lyrics, as it was one of the first records to depict life as it really was in South Central LA. If you don't like rap, you will still find *Straight Outta Compton* at least amusing. Kids, if you don't know all the words to this album, go get it today and memorize them. And for all of you who haven't heard it in years it is worth the trip down memory lane.

Hot Jams: The Blood Brothers, Crimes; Engine Down, S/T; These Arms Are Snakes, *Oxeneers Or The Lion Sleeps When Its Antelope Go Home*; Spanky Van Dyke, *Sketches Of Grace*; Paper Chase, *Hide The Kitchen Knives*.

fact still play. The best of the new songs are "Groovy MF," "Cunt Sandwich" and "Sucker Punch." There are also a few bonus tracks, featuring guest vocals from Joe King, Jeff Dahl and Jeff Clayton. The Jabbers didn't fit in way back when and probably won't fit in today, but those wanting to check out a fun new release with a classic punk sound shouldn't miss this one. (AE) Steel Cage, PO Box 29247, Philadelphia, PA 19125, www.steelcagerecords.com

◆ Jake Brennan & The Confidence Men – Love And Bombs, CD

Why do bands send out horrible bio sheets? The moment I read them, I typically toss them aside and deduct a couple points off of their review. This record is no exception. It states that Jake Brennan was at the helm of a Victory Records band (that sucks) and doesn't like the term "roots music." I don't give a shit about his previous band, nor do I care whether he likes the term "roots music." I quickly tossed his pink letterhead stinker aside and threw his album in. Good thing, 'cause this album is a solid effort. Personally, "roots music" doesn't offend me, and that is exactly what he plays. It's a valid term, used to describe indigenous music. The album contains elements of Gun Club's latter, more thoroughly country efforts (Jeffrey Lee Pierce is a genius by the way) and the Blasters' walking basslines. Country's narratives on alcohol and women are all present (always a good thing) as well as the slide guitar and pedal steel found so prominent in my record collection. *Love And Bombs* is a great record; just make sure your copy doesn't come with a mind-numbing bio sheet. (RL) Yep Roc, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-4821, www.yeproc.com

◆ Japanische Kampfhörspiele – Hardcore Aus Der Ersten Welt, CD

German hardcore almost always amazes me. This starts out like any typical angry hardcore record, but soon into the first track, it hits me that these guys are really good. They mix grind, thrash, tech metal, death metal and straight-up hardcore, and they do it seamlessly. There's a nice combination of Cookie Monster vocals with occasional screaming, hinting at the crossover of styles. Although all the lyrics are in German, the horrible translator I used to decipher the lyrics proved them to be pretty funny (although it could have just been the translator). Some of the songs take awhile to get into, but in all, this CD rips. (TK)

Bastardized, PO Box 200521, 56005 Koblenz, Germany, www.bastardizedrecordings.de

◆ Japather – S/T, 7"

More minimal and shamelessly lo-fi antics from this crazy duo on this three-song single, which shows a much, much poppier side of the band. Their usual bass-and-drums avant-noise craziness is reduced to fuzzy background beats behind unusually upbeat keyboard melodies and creepy robotic vocals. It's funny that something so "normal" (i.e.: a little bit of melody) can make a band like Japather sound totally weird. I would say that that's an achievement. (MG)

Deleted Art, c/o Samsonowitz, Lars Kaggsgatan 43A, SE-415 04, Gothenburg, Sweden, www.deletedart.org

Reviewer Spotlight: Dave Hofer (DH)

Human Remains, Using Sickness As A Hero. In fifth grade, we watched *Gone With The Wind*. Our teacher told us that even though she had seen it 50 times, every time she watched the movie, she would notice something new. As we watched the movie over the course of a few days, she would point out interesting things that us fifth graders would have never noticed. This CD is my *Gone With The Wind*. Released in 1996, this six-song CDEP was the swan song for New Jersey's Human Remains. Composed of people that went along to bands like Deadguy, Discordance Axis, and Burnt By The Sun, Human Remains has to be one of the most underrated metal bands ever. They released a few demos, two 7" records and a compilation track here and there, but none of them was as amazing as this EP. Most metal bands aren't original enough to warrant actually hearing their music as opposed to giving a friend some generic description of their sound, but the odd guitar bleeps, furious blast beats, bizarre lyrics and maniacal riffing need to be heard to be believed. Guitarists Jim Baglino and Steve Procopio were the first I heard that used seven-string guitars to their fullest potential, sneaking in some insane crunch here and there, but for the most part using the expanded amount of strings for all sorts of subtle technical nuances. The production is especially rough compared to contemporary releases, making this a headphone masterpiece in the process. My friend Zack and I have spent countless minutes listening to this and reporting back to one another. "Dude, I was listening to Human Remains yesterday. Have you heard that (makes weird guitar noise) part in 'Swollen' at like the two-minute mark? Sick." Although only 16 minutes or so long, it's a classic gone unnoticed by many.

Rich and creamy, just the way I like it: Dew-Scented, Impact; Camp-Lo, Uptown Saturday Night; Macabre, Sinister Slaughter; Ludacris, Red Light District; Patrick Hajdud, 2005 Demo.

Reviewer Spotlight: Don Irwin (DI)

Chuck Brown And The Soul Searchers, Bustin' Loose. This, one of the greatest LPs of all time, was recorded in 1978 at Sigma Sound Studios in Philadelphia, the same place where David Bowie recorded *Young Americans* in 1975. Chuck Brown, Washington DC's godfather of go-go music, really says a lot on the *Bustin' Loose* LP. It's filled with feisty dance numbers and slow ballads reminiscent of the Jackie Brown soundtrack. The LP's title track is seven minutes in heaven, and band's horn section gives the drums a run for their money. Two things will get you on the dance floor fast: a good drum beat and a nicely layered horn section. Why the nationwide hip hop audience never picked up on the wonderful drumming style and vocal delivery of go-go music is beyond me. Chuck Brown's classic sound has left the biggest impact on Washington D.C., leaving the rest of the country stuck listening to watered down Destiny's Child and Jay-Z records.

I've been listening to: Routineers S/T; Medications S/T; Yeah Yeah Yeahs' "Y Control" remixes; Lungfish; Channels; Hidden Hand; and Hoover live.

Jarvis Humby – Assume The Position, It's... CD

These Brits play a smooth combination of R&B, '60s psych and garage rock, heavy on the hooks, Hammond and harmonica. The psychedelic elements never get self-indulgent, and the soul-groove-jam parts end before they get boring. Most importantly, they write catchy songs that would rule any dance floor. A retro blast. (JC)

Hard Soul, 701 E. Third St., Suite 315, Los Angeles, CA 90013, www.hardsoulrecords.com

Je Ne Sais Quoi, The – We Make Beginnings, CD

These guys have a certain... (wave hands around here). Sorry, I couldn't resist. Actually, I know perfectly well what they have. It's called soul, son. This Swedish band segues from fragmented dance punk into space-age funk and when they bust out the group singing, it even seems like a revival. (DAL)

Coalition, Newtonstraat 212, 2562 KW Den Haag, The Netherlands, www.coalition-records.com

◆ Jello Biafra & The Melvins – Never Breathe What You Can't See, CD

Being a huge Melvins fanatic and a Jello Biafra fan, I want to like this collaboration more than I actually do. It's good—don't get me wrong—but it's not great. The work Jello's done with DK and Lard way surpasses this stuff, and The Melvins, well, if you haven't heard Ozma, Houdini or The Maggot, shame on you. Jello composed all the lyrics on this one, and he and Buzz split the music-writing responsibilities down the middle. The overall sound is more riffy punk rock than the weirdo doom/thrash/grunge stuff Buzz usually comes up with. Some of the tunes work well—"Enchanted Thoughtfist" and "Yuppie Cadillac" are killers. But then there's the meandering "Islamic Bomb," which, while the lyrics are cool, has this annoying pseudo-Latin, polyrhythmic beat that's just tiresome. So, I don't know. Check it out if you're a fan of these artists. As talented and prolific as both these acts are, I'm sure something better's gonna come along (either individually or together) soon enough. (AJ)

Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.alternativetentacles.com

Jet Set, The – We've Got The Dance Connection, CD

Guitar, drums, organ, hold the bass. Peoria's Jet Set play garage rock/R&B, but there's something missing. It's like they're playing it, but not really feeling it. The songs all kinda go on too long, and the vocals are too weak to get away with shitty lyrics like "the first five letters in discover, disco." (JC)

Wee Rock, PO Box 533, Springfield, MO 65801, www.weerockrecords.com

Jim Jacobi & Friends – Get Out!!!, CD

I couldn't find anything to like about this CD. The singing is bad, the uncreative lyrics attempt to be funny but are just stupid, the guitar solos are wanky, the packaging is boring, and the band sounds like they should be playing classic-rock covers at a sports bar. (JIG)

Self-released, <http://incolor.inetbebr.com/kahunas>

Johnston, Daniel and V/A – The Late Great Daniel Johnston, 2xCD

This is an incredible tribute album honoring the genius of underground

lo-fi wacko Daniel Johnston. Two great CDs, the first with covers of Johnston's best songs (noteworthy tracks by TV On The Radio, Bright Eyes, and Tom Waits), and the second is all the originals. A perfect album for fans and newbies alike. (MG)

Gammon, 111 East 14th St., Ste. 179, New York, NY 10003, www.gammonrecords.com

Joiya – Sometimes Is And Kinda, CD

From orchestral pop to modern jazz-funk to twee, this debut tries to cover a lot of ground. At first listen, it's too much. Luckily, the musicians are skilled, and the vocals are entrancing. It's far from perfect, but an enjoyable start. (MP)

Self-released, www.joiya.com

Juniorboys – Last Exit, 2xCD

Out of Hamilton, Canada, the Juniorboys produce electronic pop in the vein of early '80s New Order, though with updated beats and a more calming vocal sensibility. A bonus disc contains superb remixes by Mani-toba, who is from the same town, and Fennesz, both of which further update the sound. (BA)

Kin, www.electrokin.com; Domino Recording Company Ltd., www.dominorecordco.com/usa

Junius – Forcing Out The Silence, CD

There's nothing grippingly original about Junius' take on driving, cut-time, atmospheric post-hardcore, but damn they do it well. Choosing wisely in borrowing tactics, their drop-D style and melodic vocals bear a striking resemblance to Failure. Innovation aside, I'd be all thumbs up if not for the fake British accent and occasional demon scream. (BM)

Radar, PO Box 1205, Alston, MA 02134, www.radarrecordings.com

◆ Jurado, Damien – Just In Time For Something, CDEP

I love the sound of a distorted guitar, a heavy riff and pounding drums. I'm a sucker for those huge Black Sabbath, Slayer, and AC/DC riffs. Put on "Cat Scratch Fever" or "Symptom Of The Universe," and I'm there, dude. But I've often thought that the mark of a truly great song is the ability to strip away the electricity, fuzz and bombast, sit down with an acoustic guitar and just play the song. If the song can communicate the artist's emotions without all the bells and whistles, then the tune will live forever. Damien Jurado has given the world five tunes here that are pure gold. Just listen. The dude has a very understated way about him that totally hits home with a sentimental fella like myself. If his busted-heart folk-blues tunes don't choke you up a little, then you've got no soul, pal. Excellent stuff, highly recommended. (AJ)

Secretly Canadian, 1499 West Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

◆ Juventud Crasa – Después De Tanto Tiempo, CD

Puerto Rico's answer to Leftover Crack is here, and their name is Juventud Crasa. This CD simply blew me away. It's a perfect blend of hardcore and melody, with a fiercely evocative vocalist. The lyrics are exclusively in Spanish, with an English translation sheet in place for those of us too



ignorant to be fluent in the second-most spoken language in the U.S. The best track, an anti-religious anthem entitled "To Obedecemos," won me over immediately, as did the rest of this quickly paced roller coaster ride of an album. The production is slick, and the songs are tightly constructed. The resemblances to LOC are both thematic and musical, as this band seems to borrow from most of punk's popular subgenres without seeming too calculated about it. (AE)

Self-released, José Ibáñez, Calle 4, C-5 Parque Montebello, Trujillo Alto, Puerto Rico, 00976

☞ Kants, *The – This Book Is Deadly, 12"*

This engaging indie rock from a spry little Texas trio is a nice little surprise. They play a mix of DC post-hardcore and Touch & Go-type abrasiveness. The guitars switch from screeching notes to subdued parts to wringing melodies. The drums pound away with severity and jazzy little tempos. And the bassist seems to hold it all together with thick, inventive bass lines that allow the guitar to go off in other directions. Their vocalist is low in the mix, having to scream his semi-hoarse voice at times to be heard, almost like a rougher, younger version Kurt Cobain. Great stuff. (NS)

StreetCar Music, 5402 Jackson #2, Houston, TX 77004, streetcarmusic@hotmail.com

☞ Kid Dakota – *The West Is The Future, CD*

That's a big title to live up to, but these alt-country kingpins in the making let you know they have manifest destiny in their sights and the goods to get there. The opening track builds tension beautifully with a tight song structure punctuated by rolling drum bursts. They use that again and again as their songs start sparsely and attain epic scope, often with the assistance. They have a lot going for them, most notably the fact that songwriter and vocalist Darren Jackson, a native of South Dakota, can actually sing, and he has a voice well-suited to the highs and lows and distant echoes of the music. Also, most strikingly, the album jacket is magnificent, with awesome works of art by Will Schaff (who apparently is some sort of goth Diego Rivera) accompanying the lyrics to each song. Lyrically, the songs chart trips and sketch scenes from the plains and the upper Midwest (the band formed in Minnesota), mostly with subtle and evocative results. When they try to make a social statement on a song about Pine Ridge, it's simplistic and falls flat. (DAL)

Chair-Kickers Music, PO Box 600, Duluth, MN 55801, www.chairkickers.com/label

Kill Your Idols – *Live at CBGB's, CD*

Most of you have heard Kill Your Idols, and this is an OK recording of their first headlining show at CBGB's. There's nothing special here, but if you are a huge KYI fan, this should be worth picking up. (TK)

Ass-Card, Annenstrasse 5, 44137 Dortmund, Germany, www.asscardrecords.com

Killdrama – *Culling Songs, CDEP*

Killdrama is a standout emo-core band that strikes another hit with this complex four-song EP. The rasping vocals are harsh and brilliant, keeping this from suffering the fate of most of its mooney emo competition. Killdrama is well worth looking for, although I wish they'd put out longer releases. (AE)

Self-released, www.killdrama.com

☞ Kit! – *S/T, CDEP*

It's all too tempting to compare this female fronted pop-punk band to Discount or Tilt, but that would be selling them short because they have a wonderful and unique sound. Taking pop convention and adding in a very subtle pinch of a dance music influence, this Sarasota group is doing its own thing. Besides the dance influence, they also add technical bass lines, which aren't usually present in pop-punk. Their song titles are al-

most as creative as the songs themselves and include "Dude, Where's My Dude?" and "Precise, But Not Accurate." I rarely fall for a band in such a rapid hook, line and sinker fashion as I have for Kit! They're just so damn irresistible. (AE)

Forever Escaping Boredom, 416 45th Street Court West, Palmette, FL 34221, hgharmon@mail.usf.edu

Klang – *No Sound Is Heard, CD*

Elastica guitarist Donna Matthews is in this trio, but that's irrelevant because this intimate record sounds almost nothing like Elastica. Flirting with minimalism, Klang uses little more than naked guitar, bass and drums to create percussive, throbbing songs bursting with tension. Call it "post-" music: post-rock, post-punk, post-electronic, post-whatever. Good. (JM)

Blast First Petite, www.blastfirstpetite.com

Knives, *The – S/T, CD*

I wish I could read you the onesheet that comes with this disc; they're very proud of their cymbal and shoe sponsors. This is total radio cock rock, allegedly inspired by the Stooges. Fans of nü metal and cheesy wah-wah guitar licks will love this. (EA)

Self-released, www.theknives.net

Knockdown – *The Game Is Ours, CD*

Holland's Knockdown play generic street-punk, badly. The lyrics are cringe-inducing meathead thug bullshit with a liberal dose of misogyny. Their broken English does make their tough-guy shit somewhat hilarious, though, with lines like "I'll blow your sick head just away / I'll put you at a lower rung!" Oh, you boys. (JC)

Rebellion Holland, Engstoeep 57, 5246 BD Rosmalen, Netherlands, www.rebellionrecords.nl

Kodiaks, *The – Cherry Blossom, Evil And Alcohol, CD*

Crazy, fast punk rock—think the Germs on drugs (oh, wait...). A rather annoying record, so abrasive that your neighbors will hate for it. I doubt I'll spin it too much, except as an example of what drunken Texas Friday nights must be like. (EA)

Super Secret Records, PO Box 1585, Austin, TX 78767, www.supersecretrecords.com

Kuolleet Kukat – *Antologia, 2xCD*

Finish hardcore isn't exactly my specialty, but this is probably a great place to get hooked. This double disc anthology contains every studio recording, and all their lyrics in Finnish. Kuolleet Kukat have a great, non-generic sound. I have no idea what they're saying, but who cares? (EA)

Fight Records, Hikiuoreenkatu 17 D 36, 33710 Tampere, Finland, www.kolumbus.fi/fight

Kung Fu USA – *R.R.R.M.L., CD*

If I had to make up a category for this, it would be "circa '90s grunge-pop-punk." It's dismal and dreary, without a hint of originality. Sorry, Kung Fu, I wish I had something to recommend it. (JG)

Star Cleaner, www.starcleaner.com

Kurt / Popular Shapes – *split, 7"*

Germany's Kurt offer a pair of relentless rockers sure to whip you into a frenzy with their resonant hooks and furious delivery. Popular Shapes make a solid complement with their side, a stubborn offering in which catchy snippets are elongated, dashed and sped up, challenging you to listen with your brain. (DAL)

X-Mist Records, PO Box 1545, 72195 Nagold, Germany, www.x-mist.de

La Pieta – *Summer, CDEP*

Charming, conversational boy-girl pop reminiscent of Luna, La Pie-

ta sound calculatingly restrained. The subtle guitar work is a soft bed for the intimate vocals, yet it builds to a controlled intensity that carries the six songs despite the EP's unwavering tempo. A warm, cozy little record that will leave you longing for its namesake season. (LW)

Contraphonic, PO Box 2203, Chicago, IL 60690, www.contraphonic.com

Ladykillers – *Welcome To Rock 'N' Roll Kid, CD*

Semi-raunchy street punk. Yawn. Snotty California dude vocals, Ramones melodies and wanna-be Steve Jones guitar solos. I know rock 'n' roll, fellas, and you guys sure as hell aren't ready to teach any courses on it. Plus they butcher Tom Petty's "Won't Back Down" by trying to "punk it up." (AJ)

No. 3 Records, www.number3records.com

Last Chucks, *The – Zombie High, CD*

Competent, if somewhat generic, debut from this Atlanta pop-punk trio. Lots of up-tempo, sunny guitar playing, woo's and woes, repeated choruses, whiney vocals and clever/cute high school love lyrics. (TG)

Self-released, www.theelastchucks.com

Lee Marvin Computer Arm – *S/T, CD*

The name of the band sucks, but they fucking rule! This shit is from Detroit, as it fucking has to be. Lee Marvin whatever reminds me of The Flash Express or a band Greg Cartwright might produce. WAHHHHAWAHH! Yeah! Energy! This is pure fucking proto-punk/garage insanity. I'm listening to this record as I type, and I struggling not to hurt myself. Kick out the jams, motherfuckers! (RL)

Conspirators in Sound, 19369 Fairlane Ct., Livonia, MI 48152, www.conspiratorsinsound.com

Leeches, *The – Integration, 7"*

Two instrumental tracks of organ-driven garage, almost surf. Many bands have done this better, so I don't think two short tracks of rather ordinary instrumentals make a great single. I love much of Kapow's roster, but this isn't anything special at all. (EA)

Kapow, PO Box 286 Fullerton, CA 92836, www.kapowrecords.com

Leftover Crack – *Rock The 40 Oz., CD*

The last great ska band was the Untouchables, but Rock The 40 Oz. leaves me optimistic for the future. I don't think the album title is name checking Cherry Coke, but if they support queer rude boys, that much the better. The highlight of the CD is guest vocals by the Distillers on "Muppet NAMBLA." (DI)

Bankshot, www.bankshotrecords.com

Legs Up / My War – *split, CD*

A pair of pretty straight-up hardcore/thrash acts. Legs Up is the better of the two, utilizing some arrangements that are based around more than screaming. Still, the band disappoints by naming a song "Get Awesome," and then failing to mention the words "get awesome."

State of Mind, PO Box 351 Port Jefferson, NY 11777, www.stateofmindrecordings.com

Les Georges Leningrad – *Sur Les Traces De Black Eskimo, CD*

Les Georges Leningrad return with the follow-up to their debut, and this time around the outfit, now a trio, has dodged the sophomore slump by adding a little mixing sheen to their gritty mindfuck, avant garde version of house music. A collapsible dance party for fans of the herky-jerky. (CC)

Alien 8 Recordings, www.alien8recordings.com

Let It Burn – *The Expanding Universe, CD*

What a letdown. I remember liking an earlier EP by this band, but where that EP was a nice twist on the old punk/rock 'n' roll thing, this full-length

Reviewer Spotlight: Ari Joffe (AJ)

Brujeria, Raza Odiada. "Brujeria" is a Spanish word meaning "black magic" or "witchcraft." The title of the album translates to "Hated Race" and opens with a skit featuring Jello Biafra as Gov. Pete Wilson being shot to death by the band for declaring war on California's Mexican community. Thus begins Brujeria's second full length, recorded in '95. It's a big step up, in terms of both songwriting and the scope of their sound, from their '93 debut, *Matando Gueros*. On *Matando*, they played fairly straightforward, if extremely well done, grindcore. With Raza, the group managed to write a slew of all-out metal anthems, remarkably catchy songs that still retain the eardrum-battering traits of death, grindcore and thrash metal. The riffs found in "Hechando Chingasos," "La Ley De Plomo" and "El Patron" rattle around in your head for days on end. It's almost dangerous to drive while listening to this stuff. Plus, where the subject matter of *Matando* stuck close to chants about cocaine and "Satan is my father and I fuck dead gringo virgins to honor him" type of stuff, Raza expanded their lyrical topics to deal with political themes, albeit in an almost gangsta rap, N.W.A., kinda way. No fear though—El Diablo isn't completely pushed aside; he's just gotta share the spotlight with the band's other heroes like Pablo Escobar and the Menendez Brothers. Oh yeah, and it's all growled out in Spanish, which makes it sound all the more evil.

Drinkin' black coffee/Stare at the walls: Black Flag, Live '84; Son Volt, Trace; Nirvana, *With The Lights Out* (box set); The Moaners, *Dark Snack*; Fudge Tunnel, *Creep Diets*.

is generic melodic punk. It's all big '70s MOR (middle-of-the-road) rock choruses over standard MOR punk. Zzzzz, puke. (RR)
 Chunksaah, PO Box 977, Asbury Park, NJ 07712, www.chunksaah.com

Lexington Down - The Flicks, CDEP

These are four of the drabest indie-rock tunes I've heard in awhile. This band appears to be going through all the motions of being a band, i.e. they recorded and designed a nice CD sleeve, but they forgot to write songs that anyone would care about. (AE)
 Self-released, www.lexingtondown.com

Libretto - Illoet, CD

Portland's Libretto has quality beats and hooks aplenty, but lacks the vocabulary, rhyme schemes and wit needed to make them worthwhile. Reminiscent of the positive and poetically natured hip hop of 10 years back, Libretto's vocal similarity to Gang Starr borders on scandalous. Five outta 10. (BM)
 Dim Mak, PO Box 348, Hollywood, CA 90078, www.dimmak.com

Lights Out - Get Out, CD

Get Out is a thrashy, hardcore punk record with pissed-off vocals and lyrics. This record is speedy and energetic, but lacks any sort of variety. It's been done before, and it has been done better. (EH)
 Youngblood, PO Box 236, Ephrata, PA, 17522, www.youngblood-records.com

Little Yellow Box - Et Cetera, CDEP

I appreciate a band that isn't afraid of experimenting with its sound, but when it's unfocused, such lack of direction can be disquieting. LYB delivers a record akin to At The Drive-In with Coheed & Cambria influences, but there's too much to take in over the course of five songs. (BN)
 Negative Progression, PO Box 193158, San Francisco, CA 94119, www.negativeprogression.com

Lockgroove - Calm Right Down, CD

Lockgroove took several years to make this record, which sounds fake enough to be a school project on making a Britpop disc. Calm Right Down feels like it's trying to be different, edgy and experimental, but without the spontaneity that makes rock 'n' roll so great, it's just stale. (EA)
 Shark Attack, PO Box 600-466, Newtonville, MA 02460-9998, www.sharkattackmusic.com

Lopez / Bottles And Skulls - split, 7"

Lopez is fast and loud, a mix of metal and punk that reminds me of Zeke, but missing any memorable hooks. I liked the Bottles And Skulls side, which is a little darker with an almost ska-like guitar rhythm on one song. (JG)
 Self-released, www.homestead.com/lopezux

Los Eskeletos - Big Trouble In Little Village, 7"

In the early '90s, when I could be found at a Los Crudos show singing along, life was good. Los Eskeletos remind me of when that sound was big, but the shows were small. Do you remember 30 kids in a tiny basement, sweating walls, screaming along? I kind of forgot how much I really got into the music until I heard this. Any record with a Mohawk on a

skeleton makes me wince, but Los Eskeletos won me over in eight songs on two sides of a single. (EA)

Southkore Records, 2814 S. Spaulding Ave., Chicago, IL 60623

Los Griswolds - Bring the Rock!, CD

Ah, the ubiquity of white-trash chic. This is a perfect example of poor content eclipsing all sense of good musicianship. Sample tracks from this punk/rockabilly piece de torture: "What Would Burt Reynolds Do?," "My Doublewide" and "Cheap Beer Buyin' Fool." Just listening to this makes me feel like I'm pumping someone's gas. (TG)
 Self-released, www.losgriswolds.com

Lost Sounds - Future Touch, 12"

The first thing you need to know about this record is that it sounds a lot better at 45 RPM than 33. That speaks mostly to my inability to operate my own record player, but the fact I sat there listening to it for so long at the wrong speed says there must be something interesting going on musically. Imagine a garage-rock band that only plays on Halloween when your garage is decorated with cobwebs, fake blood and bowls filled with peeled grapes that are supposed to be eyeballs. Take that and transplant it into space, and you begin to grasp Lost Sounds. This Memphis group doesn't sound quite like anyone I can remember, so they get points for originality. Not only do they boldly bring both a synthesizer and a cello to the table, but they make them rock hard in conjunction with energetic guitar work, infectious riffs, capable male-female vocals, and a hearty dose of giddy goth inspiration. (DAL)

In the Red Records, PO Box 50777, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheredrecords.com

Lost Sounds - S/T, CD

Lost Sounds' trebled-out synthesizers and reverberating vocals don't separate them from electro-punkers, but the way their raucous songs avoid all the predictable pitfalls that lead to New Wave posturing does. The hyperactive pace of the record gets redundant, but they'd be a great band to see on a Saturday night. (CC)

In the Red, PO Box 50777, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheredrecords.com

Love Of Everything - HandJob Community, CD

As with last year's Total Eclipse Of The Heart, Bobby Burg remains easily shakable. Crashing into notes like a drunk bird, the Ohio native and member of Joan Of Arc and Make Believe somehow always stays airborne though there are moments of worried skepticism. A whole lot of minimalism makes every time he sings about falling apart, wanting to fall apart or dismantling something familiar feel like the somber, stiff crunch of a new snow. But, as is the case with a real snow, that pristine freshness doesn't last for many walks. Listen in moderation. (SM)
 Redder, 34 Hawxhurst Rd., Monroe, NY 10950, www.redderrecords.com

Love Is Red - The Hardest Fight, CD

Hey, these guys give song explanations. Not too many people do that anymore, so kudos for that. I'm sure when they play lots of kids pull out their best ninja moves. They have the tough-guy breakdowns that

are perfect for some rabbit punches and swing kicks. It isn't all macho, though. There are quite a few melodic guitar leads. Overall, this is more tolerable than most bands of this genre. To the label: If you are only going to send a CD and its booklet, make sure your address or name are somewhere on one of the two. Luckily I reviewed another CD that had the same label logo and I got the info from there. (DA)

Stillborn, 609 Campbell Ave., Ste #7, West Haven, CT 06516, www.stillbornrecords.com

Lucky Stiffs, The - Today Will Follow You, CDEP

Six midtempo, '70s-style punk tunes that project optimism, as much through the lyrics as from the ascending riffs. The San Francisco group still manages a high snot factor in the vocals, and from the band photo there's at least one mohawk. So fret not, this isn't "Shiny Happy People" or anything. (DAL)

Five & Dime Records / self-released, www.theluckystiffs.com

Mad Caddies - Live From Toronto: Songs In The Key Of Eh, CD

Nineteen tracks of the Caddies' now well-known, punked-out ska recorded live this past St. Patrick's Day at the Opera House in Toronto. If you're a fan you likely already own this, and if you are not, this live recording is unlikely to change your mind, eh? (BN)

Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119-3690, www.fatwreck.com

Madison Bloodbath - Is That A Knife In My Back Or Are You Just Happy To See Me?, CD

The singer reminds me of Rancid (i.e., raspy 'n' gravelly), and the music sounds sort of like them or Social D. On the last few songs, the tempo is kicked up a notch, and the singer starts screaming. The music rates a solid OK. (JG)
 Self-released, PO Box 15, Redlands, CA 92374, madisonbloodbath@aol.com

Magnolia Electric Co - Trials & Errors, CD

I got interested in Jason Molina's first band, Songs: Ohia, by way of Will Oldham and Co. Those influences are sadly lacking in this, his newest project. This live album marks a significant transition from Molina's earlier stuff, and so I wasn't sure how to take it in the first couple listens. Molina's voice is still overwhelmingly present, as are his (occasionally) wrenchingly sincere lyrics. Although the usual themes abound, they're now bedded in warm, full, almost classic rock tones (yes, reminiscent of Neil Young). Most of the lyrics on this album point towards themes of change, as in "I've Been Riding With A Ghost." Although I definitely prefer early Songs: Ohia albums to this, I respect Molina's willingness to try new things. And this is definitely worth a listen for fans and/or fans of classic '70s rock. (TG)

Secretly Canadian, 1499 West Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

Malachi Constant - Infinite Justice, CD

Slightly artsy, melodic, atmospheric post-rock that's almost instrumental except for some whispered/quietly screamed vocals every now and again. The musicianship is tight, and the guitars go from beautiful picking and twinkling to these groovy, almost danceable parts. Great drumming work and impressive overall. This one's a keeper. (KM)

Gullit Ridden Pop, PO Box 11894, Saint Paul, MN 55111, www.gullitridenpop.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Scott Jones (SJ)

The Jesus and Mary Chain, Automatic. This album rocks so hard it hurts. Just ask the Pixies, who covered "Head On" from this record soon after its release, which is about as much indie cred as you could ever hope for. I don't know why everyone else hates this album, and don't even get me started with the people who say that Honey's Dead is better than Automatic—at least every song on Automatic is listenable. All right now that I'm done defending this record, let's talk about the music. Things start off a little slowly with "Here Comes Alice," but then we're off and running with "Coast To Coast," a Fear and Loathing-style drug-filled joyride. Sometimes it's difficult to tell whether the Reid brothers are singing about drugs or sex, but with lines like "Feels like something pumping through my veins / I got the junk gun fever sinking to my brain," I'm pretty sure this one is about drugs. "Blues From A Gun" keeps things rolling with a riff that sounds like a distorted version of Depeche Mode's "Master And Servant" with a Madchester-style beat programmed into the drum machine. Up next "Between Planets" may well be the best song on the album with its driving beat and sing-along melody. On "UV Ray" we hear some of William Reid's trademark feedback squalls that rival Hendrix on a good day. I could go on and on, but instead I'm just gonna pray for a Jesus and Mary Chain reunion.

Reviewer Spotlight: Tim Kuehl (TK)

Registrators, 16 Wires. The three or so regular readers of my reviews know that I love Japanese punk rock, and this is quite possibly the best recommendation yet. The Registrators have been playing for quite awhile now and released a few records here in the U.S. on Rip Off Records. In their beginning, they played '77-style punk much like Teenegenerate, but as they progressed they began incorporating a lot more power pop and new wave to their sound. With their changing style, they still maintain the most important aspects of their sound such as the perfect placement of guitar and vocal harmonies, stellar bass lines as well as the catchiest oh's I've ever heard. 16 Wires has a good mix of their old and new styles, as well as some great production. It's hard to pick favorite tracks, but "Pink Lipstick," "Toy Collector," "TV Hell" and the guitar riffs on "Romantic Disaster" are the ones that stick out to me. It is pretty hard to be in a bad mood when you listen to this record. I can't recommend it enough. When you realize how mind-blowing this record is, hunt down the rest of their catalogue. It is all worth owning.

Tim's listening to: Holy Ghost Revival, Pagans Make The Trees Grow, The Starvations, S/T; The Ramones, Ramones Mania; The Crucifucks, Wisconsin.

**Malady – S/T, CDEP**

If it weren't for the vocals on this CD, Level Plane would be bowling a 300 game with me this issue. The guy's voice reminds me of a less whiney version of Perry Farrell (Jane's Addiction). Musically it's technical and melodic, but nothing special. (DA)

Level Plane, PO Box 7926, Charlottesville, VA 22906 www.level-plane.com

Malkovich – A Criminal Record, CD

Nü hardcore is certainly a step up from musclecore, but it's no old hardcore. That abject lesson is brought to you by Malkovich. The compelling music takes less than obvious turns, the lyrics are abstract, but the immediacy of this music isn't there, despite the loud guitars and the guy hollering. (RR)

Reflections, PO Box 977, Asbury Park, NJ 07712, 456-457, 6822 GW Arnhem, The Netherlands, www.reflectionsrecords.com

Man Man – The Man In A Blue Turban With A Face, CD

Man Man are a crazed circus revelry with a whiskey-throated ringleader conducting a panoply of percussion, amidst trumpets, marimbas, synths, xylophones and whatnot—the first track even includes a chorus of preschoolers. This is an exhibition of creativity if you can handle the rapturous insanity of it all. (BA)

Ace Fu, PO Box 552, New York, NY 10009, www.acefu.com

Mandeville, Mark – Leaf Tornado, CD

There is just something about recording an album about loneliness on a four-track that makes it more poignant. Mark Mandeville's Conor Oberst-style vocals and stripped-down, acoustic confessional pop would be nearly as good if it were polished. I've been continually impressed by this little, lo-fi-oriented record label. (LW)

Nobody's Favorite, c/o Jerry Fels, 34 W. Main St., Dudley, MA 01571, www.nobodysfavorite.com

Mare – S/T, CDEP

At four songs in about 25 minutes, this is one doozy of an EP. For the most part slow, Mare incorporates some nice atmospheric into their completely unique take on metal. Not a release to be taken lightly—pack the bong and let 'er rip. (DH)

Hydra Head, PO Box 291430, Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.hydrahead.com

Marlboro Chorus, The – Youth Medium, CD

The Marlboro Chorus do the little things right, but they make a big impact. With the guitar, bass and drums basics, the band builds stripped, Spoon-style structures. No single sound or instrument dominates. Add some simple yet unpredictable textures, and you get excellent fuss-free indie pop/rock. (JM)

Future Appletree, PO Box 191, Davenport, IA 52805, www.futureappletree.com

Maserati / Cinemechanica / We Versus The Shark – split, CDEP

Hello Sir showcases three Athens, Ga., bands with a couple songs apiece. Maserati provides some complex, moving instrumentals. Cinemechanica kick it up with some punchy math-rock. We Versus The Shark fluctuate readily through numerous styles with infectious energy. These bands sound good together, making for a solid release. (BA)

Hello Sir, 201 Pittard Rd., Winterville, GA 30683, www.hellosirrecords.com

Max Cady – Tonight Alive, CD

Big beat swagger rock. A lot of the tracks are downright indistinguishable—not a whole lotta variety. Hint of Nebula here, bit of Buck Cherry there. Gets redundant pretty quickly. (AJ)

Sidearm Entertainment, 5838 1/2 Vickery, Dallas, TX 75206, www.sidearmentertainment.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Dan Laidman (DAL)

Gorilla Biscuits, Start Today. When I was 16, I started every single goddamned morning with the title track from this record. Sometimes I actually got around to playing the album, but more often than not I just stumbled through my cereal in a daze (never been much of a morning person) blaring the tune in my brain: "My room's a mess and I can't get dressed / I gotta be out by eight o'clock / deep inside I know the answer." Hell yeah. Iconic lyrics, a bouncing, unforgettable bass line, a fist-pumping chorus—what more could you want? I'll tell you what, guy: A frickin' harmonica! That song has it all, but Civ and the gang being the good guys they are, they give you a whole album packed full of unforgettable songs, from the opening hardcore pride clarion call "New Direction" through to the pissed-off-yet-kind-of-heartwarming "Cats and Dogs" (which helped lead me to becoming a vegetarian). New York hardcore legends, Gorilla Biscuits delivered clean, catchy tunes that aren't nearly as simple as they initially sound. The layers of perfect riffs and tightly controlled starts and stops only really come out after multiple listens. And the lyrics are just pure go get 'em teenage anthem fodder: "Sure I fucked up / but I got back up," or "Instead of thinking we play Donkey Kong / There's something wrong with that."

These ramblings fueled by: the new J Church, The Soviettes, Maritime, Channels, and the new Cometbus, Chicago Stories.

MC Lars – The Laptop EP, CDEP

MC Lars hits you with flows like your name was Nancy Kerrigan, though frankly, any figure skater could pick up his technique. Get past that, and you've got Al Yankovic for Urban Outfitters shoppers. The Laptop EP unpretentiously pokes fun at corporate emo, tech-toy marketing, and MC Lars' Stanford University statistics class. (TS)

SideCho, 1215 North Red Gum, Suite L, Anaheim, CA 92806, www.sidecho.com

McDonald, Wes – The Guest, CD

I have always despised country music. The Quest has some strong country influences, but strangely enough, I really like it. There are plenty of pop hooks to keep the songs in your head. The best comparison I can come up with would be Wilco, Son Volt, or later Replacements. Unlike most of the stuff I review, this will definitely stay in my CD collection. If you can handle a little rocking twang in your music, then you should check this out. (DA)

Skybucket, 2426 Heathermoor Rd., Birmingham, AL 35223, www.skybucket.com

Mcenroe And Birdapies – Nothing Is Cool, CD

If Damon Albarn (Blur) is looking for MCs for a Gorillaz sophomore album, these two fine Canadians—who look like they'd be more naturally fit for a long day of PS2 gaming than the rap game—will work. They have sharp beats and hot, bright rhymes that rival those of Minnesota's Rhymesayers crew. (SM)

Peanut & Corn, PO Box 30093, RPO Marpole, Vancouver, BC, V6P 4J3, Canada, www.peanutsandcorn.com

MDC – Corpses Of The Ultimate Dominators, CD

I received this CD while mourning the re-election of GW. There aren't many bands whose song titles or lyrics are as important as the music, but MDC is one of those bands. These native Texans take frequent jabs at Dubya, poser punks, and US foreign policy. The touching tribute to Tim Yohannan of MRR also gives some big-name punks an East Bay "Bronx Cheer." Musically these classic-sounding songs stay true to MDC form. My only complaint might be one or two guitar licks on the "Campfire Bal-lads" seem a little out of place. This CD gave me renewed hope out there that it's still possible to make a difference and make positive changes in the world. (DI)

Sudden Death, Cascades PO Box 43001, Burnaby, B.C. V5G 3H0, Canada, www.suddendeath.com

Me First And The Gimme Gimmes – Ruin Jonny's Bar Mitzvah, CD

More wacky showtune/disco covers for people who are too embarrassed to buy showtunes. You know who you are, you know every word to these songs, and you like to sing along. This is the best band you could hope for at a wedding. (TG)

Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119, www.fatwreck.com

Medications – S/T, CDEP

Former members of Smart Went Crazy and Farquet kick out noodley post-punk that exudes the sound their hometown of Washington, DC. It's definitely well done, with interesting parts and arrangements. Bring on the full-length, guys. (KR)

Dischord, 3819 Beecher St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20007, www.dischord.com

Men In Fur – S/T, CD

Most of the lyrics on this record concern animals. No, the songs aren't Discovery Channel specials, and the record doesn't bear the burdens of a concept album. Musically, the unspectacular keyboard-fueled indie pop sounds like the way a trip to the zoo feels: amusing yet melancholy. Fair. (JM)

Happy Happy Birthday to Me, PO Box 742, Athens, GA 30603, www.hhbttm.com

Methadones, The – Not Economically Viable, CD

Pop punk, a dangerous territory. For every Ramones and Buzzcocks,

there's a slew of bullshit that annoys you like a bad case of tinnitus. This band falls into the latter. (RL)

Thick, PO Box 351899, Los Angeles, CA 90035-1899, www.thickrecords.com

MF Doom – MM Food, CD

The official follow-up to Doom's acclaimed *Operation: Doomsday*, MM Food is yet another cluster of fantastic samples and beats strung together by Doom's lackadaisical rhyming method. Where *Doomsday* was a breakout and highly acclaimed solo effort (after Doom's days in KMD and subsequent musical hiatus), he's gotten much better with age. Just like most solo hip-hop records, there are collaborators, but not nearly as many as your average mainstream album. "One Beer" is actually a leftover from the *Madvillainy* sessions with Madlib; production on "Kon Queso" was handled by Chicago's own PNS of the Molemen; and Count Bass D turns up on "Potholderz." Notice a pattern? The album is loosely tied together by the concept of food, showing that it's still possible to have fun with hip-hop. After honing his lyrical and production skills as Viktor Vaughn, King Geedorah, Metal Fingers, and one half of Madvillain, Doom can seemingly do no wrong. He's all at once funky, hilarious and way over everyone's head. The only fear I have is that he burns out, and we have nothing left to look forward to. (DH)

Rhymesayers, www.rhymesayers.com

Million Dollar Marxists – Give It A Name, CD

It's not quite *Destroy-Oh-Boy*, but it does destroy. These Canucks play early New Bomb Turks-sounding rocked out punk. Get this or wash down some amphetamines with beer for a similar effect. (RR)

Gearhead, PO Box 421219, San Francisco, CA 94142, www.gearheadrecords.com

Minus 5, The – At The Organ, CD

The supergroup featuring Scott McCaughey (Young Fresh Fellows) and Peter Buck (REM) has had to reach to out the members of Wilco in search of a memorable melody. But not even that helps. This is just another collection of retro-pop tunes in search of a Tom Hanks movie about the '60s. (TM)

Yep Roc, PO Box 4821, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-4821, www.yeproc.com

Miracle Of '86 – Last Gasp, CDEP

Last Gasp is an appropriate title for what could be the band's swan song. A six-song CDEP of unrecorded and unreleased material, it seems it's just a fulfillment of a contract. That, or the band said, "Well, we've got these songs, so I guess we should record them." Singer/guitarist Kevin Devine has spent the past year or two supporting his solo act, which is already on pace to far surpass anything *Miracle Of '86* did. Regardless, this CD has good stuff on it; tracks one through three are particularly good, and they show how well the band writes catchy indie rock that has a nice, rough edge to it. "Jesus Christine," number five, is a bad piano ballad that sounds like a 1950s torch song. It's thankfully short, leading into a slow, acoustic version of "Every Famous Last Word," the title track of their previous record (and my favorite song of theirs). It ends the album on a somber note, perhaps a requiem for the band itself. Here's hoping it isn't the last we hear from them. (KR)

Immigrant Sun, PO Box 150711, Brooklyn, NY 11215, www.immigrantsun.com

Miss TK & The Revenge – XXXO, CD

The long-missing fifth Donna who just never quite fit in with the rest of the girls. Miss TK takes the spirit of "Hey Mickey" through the grinder, shredding up playful lyrics and a sweaty whisper of a voice and coming out of the smoke with an excellent electronic/punk salad. (SM)

Gern Blandsten, PO Box 356, River Edge, NJ 07661, www.gernblandsten.com

Missing Autumn – The Ambient Girl Has Learned To Speak, CDEP
Whoa. For awhile, this was straight-up, down-tempo, hoarse-voiced hell-fire. But when I left the room for a second, it became sweetly strummed indie noodling. Hmmm. After further investigation, it turns out they have a large musical range, but the screaming mostly remains the same. (DAL)
Get Around Records, 10619 St. John Drive, Mokena, IL 60448, www.getaroundrecords.com

☞ **Mono – Walking Cloud And Deep Red Sky, Flag Fluttered And The Sun Shined, CD**

Postrock isn't dead. From Japan, Mono provides this impressive set of instrumentals for a distorted symphony of guitars, strings and skillful percussion. It's often brooding but also has beautiful moments of hope within the thunderous darkness. Their influences range from Japanese noise-core and Sonic Youth, though this album highlights the effects of Mogwai and Godspeed You! Black Emperor upon their work. The album was recorded by Steve Albini in Chicago (they toured with his band Shellac), and the clarity and starkness of the sound gives it an added purity. Often albums of this sort, including Godspeed and Sigur Ros, can suffer from the tired formula of starting with a minimalist riff and having it elaborate into a dimaxing crescendo after an overly long 10 or 15 minutes. Although some pieces are long here, Mono avoids those pitfalls, providing variance not only to the album overall but also to each piece. The result is an album of severe intensity with peaks of the sublime. (BA)
Temporary Residence, PO Box 60097, Brooklyn, NY 11206, www.temporarystresidence.com

Monster Squad / The Abuse / Whiskey Rebels / Cropknox – California Republic split, CD

Four '90s-style hardcore bands share one disc with three to five songs a piece. Monster Squad, Whiskey Rebels, and Cropknox are all typical, macho, anti-establishment punk bands. The Abuse, though also generic, stand out with their strong female vocals. (EA)
Rodent Popsicle Records, www.rodentpopsicle.com

Mother's Anger, The – S/T, CD

Of all the Detroit-inspired garage bands to surface in recent memory, this two-piece from Israel is one of the freshest, with sinister guitars and bombastic drumming. Vocalist David Stich is full of personality, singing in a way that squirms around the rhythm like an alley cat on the prowl. (TM)
Dionysus, PO Box 1975 Burbank, CA 91507, www.dionysusrecords.com

Ms. Led – These Things We Say, CD

These Things We Say is an album of sharp-as-a-tack power pop that barely takes time to breathe. Cliches aside, Ms. Led plays catchy, polished music that deals with politics, feminism, the Bush-ocracy, etc. in a straightforward manner that is as urgent in its message as it is in its delivery. (AJA)
Fish the Cat, www.fishthecatrecords.com

Muddy River Nightmare Band – Too Fat For Love, 7"

Three songs from the forgettable band on this faux Motley Crue 7". What

does it sound like? Well if I really tried hard I could give you the track and album that each chord progression was stolen from. (DI)
Infringement Records / self-released, www.mrnband.net

Muddy River Nightmare Band – Who Will Be The Lucky Pierre?, CD
Another southern-fried rock 'n' roll band, though the MRNB play a more frantic, punker version of it. The songs are never too long, and the call and response choruses make this one fun for singing along. It's unexceptional, but if you like dixie-punk rock 'n' roll, then dig in, cowboy. (EA)
Last Chance Records, PO Box 42396, Portland, OR 97242, lastchance@excite.com

Mule Train – Be On Your Way, CD

Cool, fuzzy, twangy cow punk. The songs have three or four chords, two-step rockabilly beats and edgy vocals, so they should please the Blood-shot crowd. Good time whiskey punk I say! (AJ)
Warning Sign, www.warning-signrecords.com

☞ **Munly – Munly And The Lee Lewis Harlots, CD**

Country meets goth at the crossroads, and Robert Johnson is there selling his soul to the devil. Munly spins well-crafted tales such as "Big Black Bull Comes Like A Caesar" and "Cassius Castrato The She-male Of The Men's Prison" with such attention to detail you can see the dusty dirt roads and dark red bloodstains about which he sings. The string section creates carries the music throughout the CD, and it makes you sit on the edge of your seat to find out what's going to happen next to the characters in the songs. This CD is very well written and executed, creating the notion that this could be the soundtrack to some sado-masochistic musical. (SJ)
Alternative Tentacles, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141, www.alternativetentacles.com

My Abraham – The Wistful Stray EP, CDEP

Music reviews are supposed to do two things: Tell the reader what the record sounds like and whether it's good or bad. So, I'm going to cut to the chase: it sounds like a kid who just learned to play his acoustic guitar, with painful off-key singing and trite songwriting, and it sounds bad. (AA)
Bad Bunny, 52 Strickland Lane, Ardmore, TN 38449

My Disco – Language Of Numbers, CDEP

My Disco follows up their fabulous single with five tracks of formula-based, midtempo, Dischord-inspired rock. There are layers of music on each track that, without getting too experimental, create a great vibe. The vocals remind me of the many great Sacto noise bands of the '90s. (EA)
Crashing Jets, GPO Box 3341 Melbourne, 3001 Victoria, Australia, www.crashingjets.com

My Favorite Chord – Romance Is Dead, CD

Another good release from this German band. They seem to have picked up some harder influences this time around, but they're still playing catchy, melodic punk that brings to mind bands like Knapsack

or Samiam. Catchy melodies, tuneful vocals and a few yells this time around. Nice. (NS)

Ass-Card, Annenstr. 5, 44137 Dortmund, Germany, www.asscardrecords.com

☞ **My Robot Friend – Hot Action!, CD**

Self-described as the first "no man band," Howard Robot programs these Casio-electronic beats into some early '80s-soaked pop, recalling Kraftwerk, Yaz, and especially Devo. One song claims "We're the Pet Shop Boys." The software for each song is actually quite unique, with catchy melodies and memorable lyrics, which often sound as if sung by a computer's text-speaking software. Animated videos are provided on the disc, and one shows a portion of the live show, where Howard Robot wears his neon, light-laden armor and helmet and conducts the dances with sparks and fog machines. It's pure '80s party material, with enough irony to quarry night after night. Turn on the strobe light. (BA)

Protronix, 526 Utah St., San Francisco, CA 94110, www.protronix.com

Napalm Death – Leaders Not Followers: Part 2, CD

Napalm Death pays tribute to bands that have inspired them over the years by covering them. A cool concept that will hopefully turn younger metal fans onto oldies but goodies, including tracks from Chicago's own Master, Hrax, Sepultura, and Discharge. A nice treat. (DH)
Century Media, 2323 W El Segundo Blvd., Hawthorne, CA 90250, www.centurymedia.com

Nation Of Two – The Kingdom, CD

Cacophonous melodies and deconstructed timing have become a staple of the drums and guitar duos lately, and Nation Of Two is no exception, but their experiments in eclectic clamor fall apart in the transitions that should be the music's frenzied climax. (CC)
Ana-Them, 1122 East Pike St. #683, Seattle, WA 98122, www.ana-themrecords.com

Natsat – Angle, CD

This debut album is dominated by droning, languid guitar styling reminiscent of Mogwai. As is typical with many post-rock bands, of the songs that have vocals, they aren't the centerpiece or, at times, even decipherable. While it lacks the intensity of Mogwai or even Godspeed, it is still interesting. (MP)
Space Patrol, 14 Av. George Sand, 37700 La Ville Aux Dames, France, www.spacepatrol.com

Neck – Here's Mud In Yer Eye!, CD

Paddy rock played very much in the vein of Shane Pogue. Neck benefits from good songwriting, solid musicianship and an elevated sense of legitimacy (usually lacking from McGowan followers). Paddy rock fans take heed. (RL)
Hibernian, PO Box 42809, Co. Holloway, London, N19 4XF, UK

☞ **Nelson, Cynthia – The Sophie Drinker Record, CD**

Looped rhythms are the spine for Cynthia Nelson's quirky rock. Starting on a playful note with up-tempo melodies and Nelson's childlike delivery, *The Sophie Drinker Record* turns into a more somber, reflective jaunt, replacing the quirkiness of the first two songs with mellow moodiness. De-

Reviewer Spotlight: Ryan Leach (RL)

Mitch Ryder And The Detroit Wheels, Breakout....!!! Whaddya mean you don't have any Mitch Ryder? This blue-eyed soul lunatic sang with all the fury and desperation of his native Detroit carjacks. Using the template set by Stax and Little Richard, Mitch Ryder was an early contributor to Michigan intensity (think Stooges, Lester Bangs, and MC5). With amazing soul chops, Mitch Ryder hits like a wall of Velvet Underground distortion. The band didn't write much (if any), but that didn't matter. Their version of "Little Latin Lupe Lu" is the definitive one (Righteous who?) and "Devil With A Blue Dress On/Good Golly, Ms. Molly" is the greatest back-to-back punch my fumbling mind can think of at the moment. Ryder and the Wheels had what most good rock 'n' roll bands have: intensity, rawness and soul. It is the same thing that propelled Otis Redding's *Live In Europe* album, The Who's early stuff, and what Greg Cartwright continues to do on a daily basis. Ryder was the real deal.

That's Personality! Jeffrey Lee Pierce, *Wildweed*; The Reigning Sound, *Too Much Guitar*; The Gun Club, *Death Party*; John Cale, *Vintage Violence*; New York Dolls (ARTHUR KANE R.I.P.), *S/T*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Justin Marciniak (JM)

Ella Fitzgerald, The Complete Ella In Berlin: Mack The Knife. Thank goodness for live albums. I haven't the time or plutonium for my DeLorean for time travel. So if someone hadn't pressed record when Ella Fitzgerald and a quartet played West Berlin in February 1960, I wouldn't understand her brilliance. In the final two songs, in particular, her performances are as unpredictable, and we remember why we pay covers. As the band begins "Mack The Knife," Fitzgerald foreshadows the next few minutes. She says, "We hope we remember all the words." Of course, she forgets them after three verses. Her mistake shows she's human; her reaction makes her superhuman. Naturally, she improvises. On key, she freestyles an explanation and sings shout-outs to the musicians who made the song popular: "Bobby Darin and Louis Armstrong / they made a record / oh, but they did / and now Ella, Ella / and her fellas / we're making a wreck / what a wreck / of 'Mack The Knife.'" It's a showstopper, and Fitzgerald launches into "How High The Moon?" After several lines, she starts to scat. Her voice becomes a bop instrument, not just a vessel delivering words and melodies. She plays the chord changes, scats the riff to Charlie Parker's "Ornithology," mimics Armstrong's trumpet and "samples" lines to several other songs. Although the scatting isn't spontaneous, it sounds amazing, and it's thrilling to hear Fitzgerald allude to so many songs that the record sleeve should have footnotes. If all performances were this incredible, Ticketmaster fees might be OK.

Previously on As the Record Spins: *All Things Must Pass* by George Harrison; *From A Basement On The Hill* by Elliott Smith; *Remain In Light* by Talking Heads; *Like Water For Chocolate* by Common; three mixes from three friends.



spite the change in pace, the album still works. On such songs as "Ocean Question" and "Fuck-It Flag," two of the strongest on the album, Nelson's voice becomes more mature and steady sounding, adding the personal to the machination of cyclic guitar-playing and barebones drums. Mixed with glittering notes and Nelson's quiet croon, the multirunning repetitions are happily inebriating. (AJA)

Fort Necessity, PO Box 1610, New York, NY 10009, www.thesophiedrinker.com

☛ **New Breed, The – Off The Beaten Path, CD**

This CD grows on you with each track. Not being a huge fan of street punk, I do think this record sounds great at times. The first track's title, "Sounds Like Shit," is ever so fitting. Most street punk records tend to bore me—the message, the tone, the mentality—it's usually quite painful. But the New Breed definitely strives for greatness in a similar way punk bands did back in the day. They keep it simple and from the heart. The musicianship may be pretty simple, but it's incredibly well put together. There are elements of alt-country, folk, Celtic, and rockabilly blended with punk. Lyrically they don't have a lot to offer, but there is quite a bit of passion in this guy's rough voice. The blue-collar message is a bit overdone, but they do it better than most. It is, in a lot of ways, the folkie delivery that makes it unique. This is a quality release for this genre and then some. (DM)

Thorp, PO Box 6786 Toledo, OH 43612, www.thorprecords.com

☛ **New Brutalism – Turbo Record, 7"**

Rarr! New Brutalism angry! Make record that rawks with shouted vocals! New Brutalism fall into screamo stereotype! (JJG)
ABC Group Documentation, 878 Mallory Drive, Marietta, GA 30062, abcgrouppdocmentatlon@yahoo.com

☛ **New Spain, The – S/T, CDEP**

Someone put Red Bull in their coffee. The fierce vocals match a tick-tack-tack drum style that threatens to keep you up at night. Even the breakdowns feel like they've taken a short-lasting chill pill. The intensity makes it likeable even though it's a mess of stray chords, synthesizers, wails and underdeveloped themes. (DAL)

The New Spain, 66 Jackson St., Brooklyn, NY 11271, www.thenewspain.com

☛ **New Standard, The – S/T, CD**

Instead of re-releasing their early material, this early-'80s DC proto-punk band rerecorded 11 tracks and tacked on a five-song unreleased demo from 1982. I like the early tracks, but the rest is unremarkable. Twenty years takes the bite and amateur quality away from the music. (EA)
Cherokee Mud, www.cherokeemud.com

☛ **New Trust, The – We Are Fast-Moving Motherfuckers, We Are Women And Men Of Action, CDEP**

Members of the Velvet Teen, Benton Falls, and Transistor Transistor play catchy, edgy indie rock with a quick tempo. Josh Staples' crooning voice reminds me of the Alkaline Trio's Dan Andriano, and, like Andriano, it kind of bugs me after awhile. Overall, though, this is a well-executed, good-sounding record. (KR)

Slowdance, PO Box 11223, Portland, OR 97211, www.slowdance.com

☛ **Niblett, Scout – Uptown Top Ranking, CDEP**

Scout Niblett's voice is gorgeous and simply unforgettable. Her slow lullaby crooning and minimalist modern folk both haunts and soothes, inducing rare and welcome spine tingles. *Uptown Top Ranking* features a cover of an old reggae song and two remarkable, pop inclined originals. (BM)
Secretly Canadian, 1499 W. Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

☛ **Reviewer Spotlight: Todd Martens (TM)**

Caviar, S/T. The first time I heard this band was in a movie theater in Santa Monica, Calif. The credits were rolling on the first *Charlie's Angels*, and along came Caviar's "Tangerine Speedo." For those who haven't heard it, it's the kind song that deserves to be hated. It's incredibly over-the-top and features a bossanova sample that's damn near obnoxious. While it strives for some sort of retro-cool, the cut's more silly than it is glam. Yet every day for the next five-and-a-half weeks I found myself humming the chorus, and finally relented and grabbed the CD used. Today it's one of my favorite power-pop CDs, right up there with the best of Material Issue, Cheap Trick, and Redd Kross. "Tangerine Speedo" leans toward the guilty pleasure side of the spectrum, but the rest of this 5-year-old debut glimmers with arena-ready hooks, sarcastic lyrics and an insanely clever mix of electro-pop and rock. "Goldmine" is perhaps the catchiest song ever written about a divorce, and "Sugarless" takes a sample from baroque '60s pop group Left Banke, then ramps it up into an irresistible dance-floor-worthy rock anthem. Caviar sprung out of the ashes of Chicago's Fig Dish, but that probably doesn't mean anything to you unless you're near 30. The act just released a new CD, *The Thin Mercury Sound*, which is just as strong.

Stuff that doesn't suck: Sage Francis *A Healthy Distrust*; Stones Throw Records 101 CD/DVD; Chin Up Chin Up, *We Should Have Never Lived Like We Were Skyscrapers*.

☛ **Night Terrors – A Cocktail Of Ravage Delight, CD**

A Cocktail Of Ravage Delight is almost what I would call a straight-up metal album. The first song opens with a delicately picked guitar intro, and when the song kicks in, there's a melodic guitar lead that sounds like vintage Iron Maiden. There's an obvious Metallica influence as well, and that's without even mentioning the part in "Ever Since My Exorcism" where the band stops on a dime and someone whispers "damage incorporated" before the song kicks in again. If you've read this far, perhaps you're wondering why I would "almost" call this a straight-up metal album. It's the singing: Instead of a metal falsetto or some torn-larynx growling, guitarist/vocalist Mike Shaw has a super snotty punk rock voice. Seriously, this guy almost sounds like Hot Rod Todd from Le Shok. It works amazingly well, and the singing makes this record so much better than it would be with a more traditional metal singer. It's worth mentioning that Night Terrors break a few other rules of metal as well: The songs are refreshingly short, the guitar solos never cross over to wanking off, etc. But man, those vocals are killer. On a scale of one to awesome, this is super great. (JC)

FDH, www.fdhrecords.com

☛ **Ninja Gun – Smooth Transitions, CD**

These guys play pretty traditional, mid-paced rock with a twang of country and a lot of heart. There are some upbeat rockers along with a handful of acoustic numbers. A few gems on here just plain rock, but the rest is too slow, countrified or crooned for me. (NS)

Barracuda Sound, PO Box 11994, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.barracudasound.com

☛ **No Hands – Free For All, CDEP**

The four-song EP opens with a Cure-like bass, then segues into more emo, power-poppy territory. The songs seem to be centered around a car crash, and they're all fast, catchy, and laced with tension. (TM)
Roast, 11306-75 Ave., Edmonton AB, T8G 0H5, Canada, www.roastrecords.com

☛ **No Trigger / Wasteland – split, CDR**

No Trigger plays some always incredible, sometimes screamy, skate rock. Fast, upbeat, energetic and a hell of a good time. Wasteland plays a grittier version of that. Faster, in your face and all screams all the time can be expected. In-fucking-tense! This one is extremely limited to 300 copies, but I would recommend tracking this one down because it is so fucking good. (DM)
Self-released, www.notrigger.org

☛ **Noise, The / E>K>U>K – split, CD**

Both of these bands sound a lot like the (International) Noise Conspiracy, minus the political lyrics. The Noise are more rock 'n' roll, and E>K>U>K take more of the pop route, but both bands do it well. (TK)
Otik, PO Box 2806 #932, Torrance, CA 90509, www.otikrecords.tk

☛ **Non Fiktion Nois – Contaminacion Mundial, 7"**

The darlings of Chicago's current Southside scene are finally documented before their all-too-early demise. They were easily my favorite of the new wave because their youth bore through Chicago's jadedness with refreshing idealism—and super-pissed screaming. Johnny is an incredible frontman who pushes the envelope with manic energy. Let's hope this isn't the last of him. The socio-political lyrics tackle the standard punk issues with a heavy lean on class and race, except it's not coming from some angst-ridden, privileged white boy. Although this recording doesn't remotely come close to their blazing live shows, it's a strong testament to scene blessed by and crippled under the shadow of the legendary Los Crudos. (VC)

Southkore, 2814 S. Spaulding, Chicago, IL 60623

☛ **North Lincoln – Truth Is A Menace, CD**

Picking up where Hot Water Music left this sound in 1996: hard-hitting, anthem-driven, emotional music with great lyrics. It's the type of music that you can't help but want to jump around and sing along to in a crowded basement. Grand Rapids, Mich., sounds like it's turning into a hub of great music lately, and bands like North Lincoln are proof of that. These 12 great songs surpass my first introduction to the band through their S/T EP I reviewed two years ago. They add a nice touch in covering The Smiths' "Jeane." They have grown as musicians, but have avoided becoming cliché. Fans of this genre should find *Truth Is A Menace* to be exactly what they were looking for. (TK)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

☛ **Northern Whiskey Syndicate – S/T, CDEP**

An entirely blue collar, alt-county EP in subject matter and sound, the first five songs are weak—too slow, stagnant and crooning. But the last two songs pick up the pace, and the three, more polished bonus tracks demonstrate that Northern Whiskey Syndicate has the potential to be a good dive-bar band. (LW)

Self-released, northernwhiskeysyndicate@hotmail.com

☛ **#1 Defender – The Diary Truthful, CDEP**

As the presence of the word "diary" in the title would suggest, this is emo, baby. There's Get Up Kids-style wailing and some Braid-like metal breaks. It's not particularly original or revelatory, but they have the style down pat, so if you're a fan of the genre, as I am, it's pure candy. (DAL)

Engineer Records, 210 William St., Boonton, NJ 07005, www.engineerrecords.com

☛ **October File – A Long Walk on a Short Pier, CD**

This is midtempo hardcore more like early '80s era Killing Joke, with a hard, distinct bass sound à la Big Black. I honestly copied the band comparisons from the press release, but I really couldn't come up with better ones. They have a unique sound, accompanied with great lyrics. A solid release. (TK)

Plastic Head, www.plastichead.com

☛ **Octopus Project, The – One Ten Hundred Thousand Million, CD**

The Octopus Project has its tentacles pulling in various sounds, combining them into humming pop instrumentals. The trio incorporated numerous other musicians to play flutes, piano, violin and trombone along with their electronic and noise merriments. It's catchy material and contains much to find in repeated listens. (BA)

Peek-A-Boo Industries, PO Box 49642, Austin, TX 78765, www.peakaboorecords.com

☛ **Of Infinity – The Essence Of Infinity, CDEP**

I guess this isn't bad for a female-fronted, overly melodic, piano and acoustic guitar laced, slightly gothic metal EP. These guys have chops, and the female vocalist has a great voice, but I think the overall effect is lost on me as I've never really been into the whole goth-metal thing. Sure, it's pretty cheesy, but I really can't front and pretend that bands like Deicide, Hatebreed and even early Slayer aren't cheesy in some way or another. This is a really well-produced effort, and to be honest, I'd rather see these guys hit it big than Evanescence. (DH)

Self-released, www.ofinfinity.com

☛ **Off Minor – Innominate, 12"**

I'd almost forgotten about Off Minor. It's been some time since I've heard their name mentioned, and, furthermore, it's been almost two years since the release of their last full-length. While the majority

of today's up-and-comings choose to pigeonhole themselves, musically and by self-proclaimed definition, Off Minor remains content off the beaten path. Continuing on their steady route of innovation, *Innominate* defies the conventional boundaries of genre, proving that both hardcore and punk still have plenty of room to grow. Swelling in jazz-influenced, angular guitars and immaculate, twisted rhythms, the band, fronted by singer James Behar's uniquely panicked chants, builds up a tension that eventually detonates into tour de force liberations. Two big toes up. (BM)

Golden Brown, PO Box 8402, Philadelphia, PA 19101

Oh My God – You're Too Straight To Love Me, CDEP

Where the unconventional and conventional collide, let there be Oh My God. This trio baffles audiences with distorted organ, lead bass, drum parts (not just a beat) and a lead singer with a dramatic voice. Yet it plays accessible rock songs, from political numbers to ballads. Imperfect, but definitely recommended. (JM)

Self-released, www.ohmygodmusic.com

Okay Paddy – Hunk, CDEP

Showing some of the same distinguishing features as early- to mid-'90s Lookout! and Asian Man Records pop-punk, Okay Paddy throw on a heavy blanket of the sarcasm that you can only find in indie rock. It brings me back to the days when MTX and MU330 were acronyms and numbers to believe in. (SM)

Prison Jazz, 431 Birch Street, Scranton, PA 18505, www.prisonjazz.com

Okkervil River – Sleep And Wake-Up Songs, CDEP

What is it with Bloomington, Ind.? Just a sleepy little college town with a lot of great bands like Okkervil River. This is an instant indie classic. The lyrics make you ponder their true meaning. The music has fluid, electric guitar lines balanced with finger-picking acoustic guitar, brushing drums and haunting vocals. (DI)

Jagjaguwar Records, 1449 West Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.jagjaguwar.com

One Up – The More Things Change, CDEP

By-the-numbers straightedge hardcore. The music has heart, and the production is good, but there isn't much deviation from the usual straightedge hardcore formula. Even with this band's mediocrity, I would

prefer it over most moshy hardcore bands. (DA)

Walk All Night, PO Box 149, Hunlock Creek, PA 18621, www.walkallnight.com

Oneida – Nice./Splittin' Peaches, CDEP

After seven years, Oneida have mastered the art of crafting the perfect psychedelic rock song. The band's plodding rhythms dissolve into the feedback of guitars, dreamy vocal harmonies and the hypnotic hum of synthesizers. An EP that's great for a Sunday afternoon zone-out. (CC)

Ace Fu, PO Box 552, New York, NY 10009, www.acefu.com

Operators 780, The – S/T, CD

This awesome stuff successfully straddles the line between dub reggae and garage punk. It sounds like a strange combo, but these Canadian kids are talented enough to make it work. The songs are catchy as hell with tremendous grooves, and the arrangements are dead on all the time. Pick this one up! (AJ)

Longshot Music, PMB #72, 302 Bedford Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11211, www.longshotmusic.com

Operation S – S/T, CD

This '70s-sounding French punk band prominently features synthesizers, which seems to be popular lately. I could come down on them for being derivative, but this release is good, if not very original. The female singer, from the No-Talents, has a mewling/squealing quality to her voice which I find sexy. (JUG)

Broken Rekids, PO Box 460402 San Francisco, CA 94146-0402, www.brokenrekids.com

Orange Island – The Morning After, CD

These guys give off a kind of loungey vibe, in an indie-rock way. The music is very relaxed, but not boring, and almost seems guided by the warm vocals. The songs are like little short stories set to music, which ebbs and flows with the tone of the lyrics. Sometimes it's soft and pensive, and other times it's thick and forceful. Although these guys run in the same circles as some bigger emo/indie bands, this band sounds too earnest and genuine to ever "make it." That's meant as a compliment, not a death knell. (NS)

Rise, PO Box 135, Roseburg, OR 97470, www.riserecords.com

Organ, The – Grab That Gun, CD

Everyone points out how everyone else points out how the Organ sounds

like the three certain legendary British masters of mope, but I'll shoot for the Guinness record by doing it all in one sentence: This Canadian fivesome harnesses the spartan atmospheric touches of Joy Division, they add the creepy sonic layering of The Cure, and, uniquely, their lyrics capture the Smiths' ultra-dever poetry of shame ("see the people sitting over there / I want to kiss and touch them everywhere / oh no, not because I really care / oh god, no, no, I wouldn't dare"). Katie Sketch's vocals are commanding, but the organ is their secret weapon, your guide through the city streets and evenings past the songs evoke. Often in these reviews I find myself sorting through a sonic mess and advising the bands to tone it down and show some subtlety. In contrast, The Organ are all about subtlety: moods and textures and sleeper harmonies that emerge on multiple listenings. Given their mastery of nuance, they could probably take it to the next level and add a loud chorus or two to the mix. (DAL)

Mint Records, 1359 Queen St. W. #3, Toronto, ON M6K 1M1, Canada www.mintrecs.com

Our Turn – Catch Your Breath, CD

Oh my god, this rules! If you could see me now, you'd see me smiling ear to ear. I've owned the 7" version for a few months already. It is by far my favorite record of the year. Nothing can touch it. This CD contains the *Catch Your Breath* 7" plus the *Step Aside* demo. I was a little bummed that Our Turn didn't include the "Unity" cover (from the demo), but they outdid themselves by including an Embrace cover at the end—infinite bonus points for that. Our Turn trimmed off the fat that most youth-crew bands include. They keep the music diverse but still true to the spirit of '88. Lyrically, this is straight from the heart. Positive lyrics that aren't cheesy are hard to come by these days. You can bet I've got my hood up and am loving this. (DA)

Youngblood, PO Box 236, Ephrata, PA 17522, www.youngblood-records.com

Over It / Midpoint / Five Days Off / National Product – Radio Songs?, CD

Five Days Off, who are from Belgium, are my favorite of the bunch. They play fast, Pennywise-inspired melodic hardcore. All four bands play mainline emo-pop or pop-punk of some form, and all are decent enough to recommend this CD. (AE)

Triple Threat, PO Box 74007 Strathcona RP0, Calgary, Alberta, T3H 3B6, Canada

Reruns: new reissues from punk rock's past.

Big Boys – Lullabies Help The Brain Grow / No Matter How Long The Line Is At The Cafeteria, There's Always A Seat, 2xLP

Being given this to review a month before Christmas tells me I must've been very nice this year. It should go without saying that the Big Boys were a hugely influential band, hailing from Austin, Texas, in the early 1980s. They combined punk rock, hardcore, and funk into their own unique sound, and they were arguably the young American punk scene's earliest and most vocal proponents of the DIY ethic. What we have here is a glorious reissue of the Big Boys' second and third long-players packaged together as a double album. Sure, the material has been in print and easy to get for years thanks to Touch & Go's *Fat Elvis* CD, but it's awesome to have these incredible albums on vinyl with all the original cover art and inserts intact. I can't possibly stress enough how essential these records are, and I implore anyone not familiar with the Big Boys to pick this up immediately. (JC)

X-Mist, PO Box 1545, 72195 Nagold, Germany, www.xmist.com

Chi-Pig – Miami, CD

This lost recording of a late-'70s new-wave band has finally made its way to CD. The sound and quirkiness of the lyrics are closer to the B-52's or Devo than Pere

Ubu and Rocket from the Tombs. (DI)

Self-released, chlpig@miami@yahoo.com

Crippled Pilgrims – Down Here: Collected Recordings (1983-1985), CD

Down Here puts two LP releases on CD for the first time, taking us back to a time when things were innocent. There are plenty of surly guitar riffs, upfront bass melodies and pop vocals for this Washington, DC trio. I'd never heard the music of Crippled Pilgrims before, but any fans of Don Dixon or Enigma Records will be all over this collection. This reissue also features the wonderful photos by Charles Steck of three fame. (DI)

Parasol, 303 W. Griggs, Urbana, IL 61801, www.parasol.com

Every Time I Die – Burial Plot Bidding War, CDEP

Maybe good for hardcore historical reference, this five-year-old EP is merely a rough outline of what the band has become over years of developing their signature brand of groovy metalcore. Do yourself a huge favor and buy their excellent full-length *Hot Damn!* instead. (DH)

Undecided, 1213 N. D St., Lake Worth, FL 33460, www.undecidedrecords.com

Monorail, The – A Whole New City, CDEP

Deja vu. They seem to have gone and rereleased their

EP. If I were a narcissist I might think it's because I spent the entirety of their last PP review talking about *The Simpsons* monorail episode, and not their pleasant, smooth, bouncy pop that exists somewhere between samba punk and jam band. (DAL)

Milquetoast Recordings, 1924 17th St., Apt. 100, Washington, DC, 20009, www.milquetoastrecords.com

Mutiny – Rum Rebellion, CD

A solid Pogues/Clash inspired effort from this Australian band. Paddy rock is a tough game for a number of reasons: Shane MacGowan's complete dominance of the genre; and the seemingly complete incompetence and lack of imagination by all followers. *Rum Rebellion* isn't breaking new ground (the first song steals a chorus verbatim from Sandinista!), but it has its own charms. The album benefits from strong narrative songwriting and trading male/female vocals. (The female vocals remind me of LiLiPut—definitely a good thing). This is one of the strongest paddy-rock albums in print not falling under "The Pogues" moniker. (RL)

Fistolo, PO Box 2836, Upper Darby PA, 19082, www.fistolo.com

North Lincoln – S/T, CDEP

Originally released as a 7", this was rereleased in CD form to incorporate four new songs, one of which is

a cover of one of Fifteen's best songs, "Notion." This band is great. See the review for *Truth Is A Menace* for more details. (TK)

Salinas, PO Box 20996, Ferndale, MI 48220, www.salinasrecords.cjb.net

Red Letter Day – More Songs About Love And War, CD

Originally released in 1991, this reissue includes tracks from their split LP and some compilation songs. Playing a British sound reminiscent of The Clash wasn't a popular choice in grunge era, so RLD were overlooked. Although not a brilliant, must-have album, it's still good. (EA)

Overground Records, PO Box 1NW, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, NE99 1NW, UK, www.overgroundrecords.co.uk

Zolar X – Timeless, CD

This collection of 20 songs from '70s space rockers Zolar X was remastered by Jello Biafra, and it comes with a lengthy history of the band, complete with abundant photos of them in signature make-up and space suits. The music mixes glam posturing with well-crafted songs that hold up very well. (DAL)

Alternative Tentacles Records, PO Box 419092, San Francisco, CA 94141-9092, www.alternativetentacles.com

**Overlord – The World Takes, CD**

Overlord play shoegazing dream pop with guitars that are sometimes jangly and sometimes fuzzed out. The music is decent, but suffers from muddy production. Singer-songwriter George Pasles seems like an interesting guy who apparently eats the same food every single day. (SJ)
Storm Tower Records, PO Box 15791, Philadelphia, PA 19103, <http://stormtower.cjb.net>

Owen – I Do Perceive, CD

After a couple of "very good but not quite great" records, Mike Kinsella has finally delivered on the promise put forth by his earlier work. This is a soul-bearing record that compiles everything that has made his musical career so impressive, and it will entrench him alongside the likes of Paul Westerberg and Elliott Smith. With deeply personal writing made all the more poignant by his delicate vocals, Kinsella has opened himself lyrically and given more substance to the pleasant, acoustic melodies that have been the staple in Owen's repertoire. In many ways moving, *I Do Perceive* is also inspiring and thought-provoking in its simplicity and directness. Always a Chicago favorite, Kinsella has made long strides in garnering national acclaim with a record that demands to be heard. (BN)

Polyvinyl, PO Box 7140, Champaign, IL 61826-7140, www.polyvinylrecords.com

Panoply Academy, The – Everything Here Was Built To Break CD

As a label, Secretly Canadian has been quietly releasing diverse music from the beautifully moody (Songs: Ohia, Dainin Jurado) and deliriously intense (Racabannon) now they've given us The Panoply Academy, who defies anything on their current roster. Imagine you're watching a warped cartoon of all your favorite bands, and a drunken mouse sloshes across your screen, then some odd robotic ghetto blaster swoops in and nabs the rodent for dinner. What just happened? A Modest Mouse got eaten by a Radiohead. In another scene, a big swirly "Q" does break-neck break dancing on an earthquaking sidewalk. It's Cursive's chaotic structure dancing on top of Pavement's dissonance. Fuck Saturday morning cartoons—this an inebriated Friday night treat. (AA)

Secretly Canadian, 1499 W. Second St., Bloomington, IN 47403, www.secretlycanadian.com

Papercuts – Mockingbird, CD

There's something about this CD that makes you feel like you've stepped back in time. Somehow this second album from Papercuts, which is essentially a one man band, seems too simple, too sublime to have been created in this day and age. Maybe it's the dreamy vocals, drifting guitars and bouncing melody that make you feel like you're carefree on a beach in California. Whatever it is, Mockingbird is stellar. Feeding off of the Beach Boys, The Mamas And The Papas, and even Isn't Anything-era My Bloody Valentine, the lazy songs swell and float along with strings, gentle drums and keyboards. Check out "Tulips" or opener "Mockingbird," and you'll instantly be reeled in. (MP)

Antenna Farm, PO Box 29855, Oakland, CA 94604, www.antennafarmrecords.com

Parallax – S/T, CDEP

Hardcore that's original in form and blistering in delivery. Technical guitar lines (Botch), spacey metallic breakdowns (Cave In) and an eensy teensy bit of melody (Indecision or Grade) are combined to form a sound that will be appreciated by anyone who liked the late-'90s wave of hardcore/metal crossover bands. (MG)

Self-released, Parallax, PO Box 970085, Orem, UT 84097, www.goldenspike.com

Pariah Caste / Out On Bail – split, CD

Pariah Caste play excellent emotional hardcore with shouted vocals that remind me of early Cursive and Small Brown Bike except with a darker

edge. Out On Bail play country-tinged folk punk with male/female vocals, though it sounds more like alt-country than rockabilly. Weird pairing, but a great split nonetheless. (KM)

Not Bad, PO Box 371292, Denver, CO 80237, www.notbadrecords.com

Paybacks, The – Harder And Harder, CD

Growing up just outside Detroit, I have a soft spot for Motor City bands that carry their Detroit influences on their sleeves. The Paybacks feature the organ player of the Hentchmen on bass, the great Rocket 455 guitarist and Wendy Case the dirtiest female vocalist after Chrissie Hynde and Joan Jett. Their sophomore effort, *Harder And Harder*, sounds tighter than their last release. Drunken nights at the Lager House with the Paybacks are to me what rock 'n' roll is about. I'm sure your big city of choice has a band like The Paybacks and you have just as much fun on a Friday night. But I doubt your locals have the love, vibe and sound of Wendy Case and her back-up band. Do yourself a favor: Pick up this disc form Get Hip and fall in love with rock 'n' roll again. You may even be inspired to pull out some '70s rock that you've been hiding in your parents' attic because it wasn't cool enough to be in your collection. (EA)

Get Hip Recordings, PO Box 666, Canonsburg, PA 15317, www.gethip.com

People Chasing People – The Dayglow Light Of Sleep, CD

People Chasing People would love to write the loud guitar song that lands on your PlayStation game and won't leave your head for weeks. Unfortunately, the Washington, DC, quartet can't find a hook. Instead, we're left with poorly executed psych workouts and peppy guitar lines that clench like an anus. (TS)

Milquetoast, 1924 17th St., Apt. 100, Washington, D.C. 20009, www.milquetoastrecords.com

Phenomenauts – Re-Entry, CD

Thirteen tracks of rockabilly space-punk. If Man...Or Astronaut? decided to ditch their garage/surf roots and play rockabilly, we'd have a great double bill. This recording is great, the samples are fun, and the world doesn't offer many choices for space-rockabilly, so pick this up. (EA)

Springman Records, PO Box 2043, Cupertino, CA 95015, www.springmanrecords.com

Pine Hill Haints, The – Those Who Wander, CD

Good, solid mix of traditional bluegrass numbers and original neo-old-school country tunes played loose and fun. Nothing too complex, just easy riding songs steeped in basic, familiar melodies. Fun for the whole family. (AJ)

Arkam, 1925 Hwy 69 S., Savannah, TN 38372

Pine Hill Haints, The – You Bury Your Hate In A Shallow Grave, CDEP

The PHH carpet-bombed us like the Mekong Delta with records this issue, and I couldn't be happier. The group, based in rural Tennessee, plays an undeniably authentic Southern music that's part country, part bluegrass, but all Americana. Just check out the instruments here: washtub bass, washboard, saw, etc., but they're not some jokey novelty act. The saw gets a bit old by track number two, but it's OK, because number three (the title track) is excellent (and saw-free). The songs sound like they were all recorded live in the studio, giving them a really authentic feeling, like someone just set up a microphone at a down-home jamboree or something (and I don't mean that in a condescending way). PHH have a sound that you can't really categorize, but will undoubtedly be lumped in with alt-country. The band is a testament to just how diverse that sound can be. I heartily recommend this record as well as the other two reviewed in this issue. They're absolutely worth hearing. (KR)

Leip, PO Box 577698, Chicago, IL 60657, www.leiprecordings.com

Pine Hill Haints, The / Dondero, Dave – split, 7"

Each side of this superb 7" interprets the South differently. Two-stepping

bass, brushed snare, a musical saw and possibly a washboard match the traditional feel of The Pine Hill Haints' two shuffling songs. In his folk song, Dondero, an influence on Bright Eyes' Conor Oberst, imagines a sad and surreal South. (JM)

Arkam, 1925 Hwy 69 S., Savannah, TN 38372

Piranhas, The – Piscis Clangor, 12"

Here we have another installment of the Piranhas' brand of howling, growling, lo-fi punk rock. Imagine the B-52's with Iggy singing, while shooting heroin onstage and singing about it. Bluesy jabs of guitar battle the caterwauling and occasional horn blasts, while the drums pound, the bass throbs, and the organ punctuates the chaos like an amusement-park disaster. This album is definitely a lot less cohesive than the other stuff I've heard from them. One song even stops midway on one side and picks up again on the other side. But when the songs do hit a groove, it's quite a beautiful mess of dirty rock 'n' roll fury. (NS)

In The Red, PO Box 50777, Los Angeles, CA 90050, www.intheredrecords.com

Pitty Sing – Demons, You Are The Stars In Cars 'Til I Die, CDEP

Nü wave group Pitty Sing wants radio play. The band could get it because the anthem "Radio" sounds like U2 with more synths. Insipid yet catchy choruses ("We're on drugs," and "We'll fuck on the radio") coerce listeners to sing along. An edited track even dismantles the F-bomb. Decent. (JM)
Or Music, 37 W. 17th St., Suite 5W, New York, NY 10011, www.ormusic.com

Point Line Plane – Smoke Signals, CD

A sleepy synthesizer blubbers in the background as a triangle dings and a light drumming tatters along until it fades into a chirping that morphs into a grinding. A background hum gives the machinery depth of field as the drums rumble back in, all along with a passionate madman's yelping. (DAL)

Skin Graft Records, PO Box 257546, Chicago, IL 60625, www.skingraftrecords.com

Poison Arrows, The – Trailer Park, CDEP

The Poison Arrows is a one-man techno-ish group. The press release says this EP is "a tribute to his 4,000+ album collection." Damn, I want to see that. Musically, I'm not completely turned off by this. It has a weird, dreary feel to it, kind of like the feeling I get when I listen to Joy Division. There's a lot of droning buzzing in the background. To play this style and keep my attention means you're doing something right. A remix done by Martin Rev (of Suicide) didn't hurt the cause either. (DA)

File 13, PO Box 804868, Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

Popular Shapes – Bikini Style, CD

Totally hot art-damaged punk rock that doesn't let up. Dual guitars battle each other like bratty siblings yearning for attention, the rhythm section rides a refrigerator down a flight of stairs, and the singer rants like an American Mark E. Smith. Remarkably, the chaos never outweighs the melodies. (JC)

On/Off Switch, PO Box 641122, San Francisco, CA 94161, www.ononswitch.com

Prefects, The – Are Amateur Wankers, CD

The Prefects were a first-wave punk band from Manchester who played some shows with The Clash and Subway Sect, pissed people off and broke up before releasing their only single on Rough Trade. This CD collects 10 mostly never-released songs along the lines of early Mekons and Wire. Good stuff worth checking out. (JC)

Acute, www.acuterecords.com; Carpark, PO Box 20368, New York, NY 10009, www.carparkrecords.com

Quantic Never Crashed – S/T, CD

Quantic Never Crashed—there's another one for the horrible band names list. Screamy emo pop for the most part, it gets a little more tech-

Reviewer Spotlight: Krystle Miller (KM)

Tchaikovsky, The Nutcracker Suite. For a long time I never admitted to enjoying classical music, but there's something about *The Nutcracker Suite* that has always intrigued me. Sure, it's fun to listen to at Christmas—I've never heard a piece of music that creates such vivid imagery of a story in my head—but I've even found it to be a moving listen in the middle of July. While beautiful and full of wonder, this album also showcases Tchaikovsky's penchant for writing melancholy melodies. There's an air of sadness about *Nutcracker* that grips you more deeply than your run-of-the-mill emo album. The strings and choirs add this mysterious, wintry quality to the record. Tchaikovsky himself lived with depression (his death is even rumored to have been a suicide) and admitted much of his work was a reflection of the sadness he felt. At least half of the tracks on here have been used in one lame, family Christmas movie or another, but forget what you know about those and listen to the suite from start to finish to really take in all its glory. Christmas will be over by the time PPreaders get this issue, so I'm sure it'll be easy to find a copy of this piece of music (often on a two-disc set) in the bargain bin. If you have \$3.99 or less to spare and want to impress people into thinking you're cultured, definitely pick up *Nutcracker*.

Now playing: The Beatles, *Please Please Me*; Daitro, *Des Cendres, Je Me Consume*; Nirvana, *Bleach*; Belle And Sebastian, *Fold Your Hands Child...!*; Bjork, *Homogenic*.

nical here and there. Don't be surprised if you see these guys signing to Revelation Records and opening for Story Of The Year. (DA)
The Death Scene, 8642 Bay Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11214, www.thedeathscene.com

Quasar Wut-Wut – Taro Sound, CD

It's like when people spontaneously pants themselves, only to reveal unsurprising underwear. Quasar Wut-Wut blends bookish pop and carnival music for titles such as "Ass Kissin' Lips" and "Beaver Fever." In all, it has a quirky way of wanting to get laid, with which it is quite hard to sympathize. (TS)
Glorious Noise, PO Box 118185, Chicago, IL 60611, www.gloriousnoise.com

Quintron – The Frog Tape, CD

If you invent a light-activated drum machine, marry your puppeteer, and establish yourself as one of the kookiest folks in all of freakin' New Orleans, why, of course you can release the "practice tapes" of your organ-playing—which is precisely what Quintron has done here. If you were once 11 years old and owned a Casio SK-1, you likely recorded something similar. One track is an instrumental version of "Stray Cat Strut." Another, "Backwards," is meant to establish Quintron's New Style of playing stuff as though it's thrown in reverse. Sans his goofy vocals and friends, *The Frog Tape's* meanderings actually fit right in with the mindless chaos of Skin Graft's early days. (TS)
Skin Graft, PO Box 257546, Chicago, IL 60625, www.skingraftrecords.com

Race The Sun – The Rest Of Our Lives Is Tonight, CD

Squeaky clean production, witless writing and flat delivery. Sound familiar? It's the same old emotional punk formula that's been done and redone time after time. Whiney vocals sung over melodies packed full of massive breakdowns and tempo changes that only distract. Not even the nice artwork could save this disc. (BN)
Fidelity, PO Box 152, Hillsdale, NJ 07642, www.fidelityrecords.com

Racetrack – City Lights, CD

Reminiscent at times of Rainer Maria, Racetrack plays upbeat indie pop that is likeable in its coy vocal deliveries, bareness and energy. Though clunky at times, with guitar fuzz overshadowing the band's melodies, it is in need of some finer tuning in the songwriting department, but the basis for some really catchy pop songs is evident. (AJA)
Skrocki, www.skrockirecords.com

Rah Bras – EPS, CD

Bizarre samples, occasional yowling/operatic vocals and a blur of jangly noise can sometimes actually add up to a really good song. This is not one of those times. Rah Bras relentless hammer of tweaks and twitters blocks out those brief moments when chaos becomes beauty. (CC)
Lovitt, PO Box 248, Arlington, VA 22210, www.lovitt.com

Randies, The – At The Friendship Motor Inn, CD

The Randies are a female-fronted power-pop band, with the "ready for regular rotation on a modern-rock radio station" sound. They'll probably be big. This album is nice and poppy, but errs too much on the fluffy side. (JIG)
Ellicit Music, www.ellicitmusic.com

Rapider Than Horsepower – Rapider Than The World, CD

Like a rambling, skin-scratching mental patient, vocalist Mike Anderson dominates the album with his creature-ific vocals that show-up the music. I suppose they'd have to, so as to avoid a spewing maniacal mess. Overall, this is weird enough to keep me listening and not so jarring as to turn off the stereo in disgust. (AJA)
Alone, PO Box 3019, Oswego, NY 13126, www.alonerecords.com

Razorblade – Spreading Fear, CD

Boring, by-the-books, skinhead oi that has the now cliched "Cookie Monster" vocals barked in a Dutch accent. (JIG)
Rebellion, www.rebellionrecords.nl

Red Eyed Legends – Mutual Insignificance, CDEP

Opener "Go-Go Girls" is an updated take on the Fall, full of drunken vocals, a bristle-thin guitar and an odd, cymbal-heavy beat that gives provides a bit of groove. Things change with "A Conquest," where punk guitars mine their way through haunted house keyboards. It's a blast for those throwing an indie-rock dance party. (TM)
File 13, PO Box 804868 Chicago, IL 60680, www.file-13.com

Red Light Sting, The – Hands Up Tiger, CD

The Red Light Sting's music can be pretty and melodic and, in a second, transition to sassy then to hard, but it somehow remains cohesive. The male/female singing duo is very talented and has quite a range. Overall this inventive CD defies genre. (EH)
Sound Virus, PO Box 55783, Valencia, CA 91385, sound-virus.com

Red Satyrs – A Little Too Quiet, CD

If you mix punk, rock and rockabilly, this is the way to do it: noisy as fuck and with a shit-ton of echo all over everything. This CD drips sweat, booze, and grease. They've really done amazing things with CD technology. (RR)
Self-released, www.redsatyrs.com

Regulars, The – Vegas, CD

Keepin' the spirit of Elvis alive—the crappy Vegas Elvis, unfortunately. These swingin' rockabilly cats went way too heavy on the glitz and shtick. No grit, it's all Vaseline and greaser cuts. There's a shitty cover of "Ring Of Fire," too. (AJ)
Rebellion Records, Mgr. Van Roosmalenplein 24, 5213 GD's, Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, www.rebellionrecords.nl

Regress – Look Who's Pulling The Strings, CD

Regress has the roots and strength to pull out a contemporary '80s-style hardcore masterpiece. This eight-song 7" or 11-song CD will fit in right along your Negative Approach single and your Minor Threat EPs. Bush is the next Reagan for punk rock, and tracks like "Your Voter Counts (For Nothing)" and "Nuclear Bomb" feel like songs from my youth. Fans of skate punk and '80s hardcore need to pick this up immediately. I have yet to mention this features members of Life Sentence, Rights Of The Accused, and Negative Element. So those experiences come across in a record that is powerful, yet sloppy enough to have that energy that made hardcore such a great genre the first time around. (EA)
Hi-Fi Records, 2568 N. Clark St., Chicago, IL 60614, www.hifirecords.com

Reptoids – S/T, CDEP

I didn't realize how much I've wanted to hear L7 play Mudhoney's equipment until I heard this. That's not to say Reptoids don't bring their own stink to the grunge-o/punk-o mix. (RR)
Self-released, www.reptoids.net

Ruining Tomorrow – Set Sail For Destruction, CDEP

Five-track disc of fast and faster hardcore with a few acoustic touches. Ruining Tomorrow show promise, so I'd like to see if they can string a whole LP together. Hardcore fans keep your eyes an ears out for this one. (EA)
Rodent Popsicle Records, PO Box 1143, Allston, MA 02134, www.rodentpopsicle.com

Demo-lition derby: CD-Rs

Beneath The Falling Skies – S/T, CDR

Totally generic metalcore in the vein of Poison The Well. A few sweet guitar riffs here and there like on "Top Gun" at 2:15, but then it breaks into this completely ill-fitting Minutemen bass-funk thing. Huh? (DH)
www.beneaththefallingskies.com

Cartoon Monster – S/T, CDR

I think this is called "sad-core." Vocals are treated like a gutter-ridden 25-cent pulp novel under the weight of Casio keyboards and guitars. Rather monotonous. (RL)
PO Box 149, Makawao, HI 96768

Fenwick – S/T, CDR

Fenwick, girl-fronted guitar rock, switches between traditional punk rhythms and more toned-down, delicate harmonies. Very often, both are at odds. Does it work? For, like, a second. (AJA)
www.fenwickrock.com

Gun Kata – S/T, CDR

Technical grind from ex-Kungfu Rick and 7000 Dying Rats. It's fast, there's a lot of screaming, and the riffs are sweet. I really hope that these guys don't abandon the chaotic recording in favor of studio-slickness if they record a full-length, because I really like when grind bands like this are firing on all cylinders, and you can't quite figure out what's going on. Did I say

"If they record a full-length?" I meant when. This I command! Get this or die posing. (DH)
PO Box 14132, Chicago, IL 60614, www.gunkata.us

Hangovers, The – Nickle Bag, CDR

These guys play lightly poppy punk rock with an old-school edge. They probably put on a fun live show, but recorded they leave a little to be desired. Great DIY packaging though. (KM)
c/o Axl, 3614 St. Francis Dr., Wilmington, NC 28409

Its!, The – S/T, CDR

Jazzy, dance rock that's relatively harmless. The singer seems to have the same sinus infection the guy from Hot Hot Heat has though—tough break. (MS)
www.theits.com

James Family, The – CDR

Sparse, acoustic arrangements that walk the fine line between sensitive singer-songwriter folk, granola indie pop and elevator muzak. (DAL)
No contact information provided

Names For Graves – Five Song Demo, CDR

Straightedge hardcore from Cleveland. It's fast and played well. I'm glad there are bands like this around. Hopefully there are more to come. (DA)
4237 W. 49th St., Cleveland, OH 44144, burnriverburn@yahoo.com

O'Connell, Dave – How To Make Everything Perfect, CDR

Super-simple acoustic guitar, political ramble and totally absurd lyrics, this album is Open Mic night material—nothing more, nothing less. (LW)
555 Ray Ln., Ashland, OR 97520, OThinkTank@aol.com

Phyal – Crude, CDR

I'd describe Phyal as having a '90s grunge/metal sound. They sound like a good live band, but the one song on this demo isn't memorable. (JIG)
www.phyal.co.uk

Reds – S/T, CDR

Not to be confused with the amazing band from Texas, these guys play decent melodic screamo. Unfortunately, I would have liked this more if they had a different name. (TK)
www.wakingrecords.com/reds

Red Light Mayhem – S/T, CDR

I'm not sure what niche they fit in, but RLM's well-written lyrics and pop sense remind me of bands that own Bad Religion records but don't copy them. (EA)
www.redlightmayhem.com

Shellshocked – Vs. The Regime

Obtuse lyrics are haphazardly screeched, apparently

from inside of a fish tank from the sound of the recording, over decently played but discordant punk slop-fests. (DAL)
www.shellshockedrock.com

Sonomatic – S/T, CDR

Garage-pop trio from Tacoma. The lead singer sounds drunk on most songs, which may account for his off-key slurred speech patterns and lack of rhythm. (TG)
www.geocities.com/sonomatic_the_band

The Stares, The Loots, And The Lyres – In The Exact Words Of Staff Sergeant Johnson, CDR

This outfit's mix of spoken word and whimsical ballads is interesting for the first few tracks, but their (lyrical and musical) impact and ingenuity disappear. (CC)
www.sdoublet.net

Sunday Tore Downs – Love Letter, CDR

"Give me hand grenades / you can swing them around like a tetherball." New Order drum machine/synth with Nico-style vocals, pending she lost her accent and addition to deep-vein dope injections. Brilliant! (RL)
toredowns@yahoo.com

**☿ River City Rebels – Hate To Be Loved, CD**

I'm a big New York Dolls fan, and I can hear enough of them to give the River City Rebels a thumbs up. Sure, they're sexist (or is it sexy?), but it's really tongue in cheek. I hope we've passed political correctness to realize that rock 'n' rollers are going to use a bunch of almost naked strippers on the back of their CD booklet to show how cool they are. Ugh. The great songwriting and hooks kept me interested, a tough task these days. (EA)

Victory Records, 346 Justine St., Suite 504 Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Rivulets – You've Got Your Own, CDEP

The first song is undoubtedly its high point: a hauntingly emotional piece with poignant male vocals and soft female harmonies layered over the quiet picking of a five-string. After that, the EP trails off into slowcore pieces that seem to drone on for twice as long as their purported track time. (LW)

Acuarela, PO Box 18136, 28080 Madrid, Spain, www.acuareladiscos.com

Rocky Denis – The Difference Between A Blade And A Pill, CD

Good name, decent modern pop punk/melodic hardcore music and annoying, overly passionate vocals. They have a lot of cool guitar melodies that break into muted choruses, plenty of good drum work and a nice, thick bass sound. There does seem to be a lot of energy going into this band, but it's hard to get passed the singer's high-pitched voice. (MS)

Heldwithitn, PO Box 34768, Chicago, IL 60634, www.heldwithitn.net

Roses Are Red – Conversations, CD

On the surface, Roses Are Red is another prefab emo-pop band with commercial yearnings. But their album is undeniably well-conceived and appealing, with surprising "freak out" passages where the singer goes nuts and sounds like he's going to puke. (AE)

Trustkill, 23 Farm Edge Lane, Tinton Falls, NJ 07724, www.trustkill.com

RSO – I Wanna Fuck / Space Commander, 7"

The A-side is just stupid: The dude screams, "Time to get drunk / And I wanna fuck," over and over again as the band vamps a not so catchy five-note riff. The B-side is a faster garage-rock rave-up that works a little better. This is another band that owes money to Stiv Bator's estate. (AJ)

Self-released, www.lostinthefuture.net/RSO

☿ Rumbleseat – S/T, CD

This is an acoustic band with Hot Water Music members, and I find a basic flaw in its conception: Why would you want to make an MTV *Unplugged* record? Three reasons come to mind: artistic freedom, cheap copout, or ignorance. Loud rock music gets old and hurts your ears. Playing acoustic music with just two guitars, harmonica and bass is a pure idea. Where does it get messed up? The first half of the record has no perception of dynamics and tempo. The smoky baritone voice grows thin, and the guitar lacks focus. The second half of the record has a better, folksy focus. Pick up Retsin's *Salt Lick* for the way it should be done. (DI)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

S. – Puking and Crying, CD

The second solo record from Jen Ghetto (formerly of Seattle's Carissa's Weird) is a haunting affair in which the electronica undercurrent lulls you along as her breathy vocals steer you to realms of nostalgia sweet, sour and that ineffable other place that only good music can touch. She's Bjork meets Billy Bragg. (DAL)

Sukide Squeeze Records, PO Box 80511, Seattle, WA 98108, www.sukidesqueeze.net

Saint Bushmills Choir – S/T, CD

Maybe it's because this is the third paddy-rock album I've received this

month, but this is the same stuff McGowan pumped out in the early '80s.

There has been absolutely no growth in this genre. If you're down with that, check this out. If not, grab some Pogues bootlegs instead. (RL)

Empty, PO Box 12301, Portland OR, 97212, www.emptyrecords.com

Sally – S/T, CD

This fresh-sounding debut from this Chicago band is moody mix of shoegaze, post-punk, and indie rock. The music is raw, with intense instrumental swells that incorporate acoustic sounds seamlessly with electronic pops and beats. My only complaint is that nasally vocals of Charlie Deeds do start to grate on the more subdued songs. (LW)

Self-released, www.sallymusic.com

Sammytown Jones – Screwed Again, CD

These guys play country- or rockabilly-influenced punk. The vocalist sounds like he just downed a fifth of Jack. I never really got this style of music, but it wasn't that bad of a listen. Still, I think even fans of the genre would find this one stale. (KM)

Self-released, www.sammytownjones.com

Say Anything – ...Is A Real Boy, CD

Thanks to Doghouse's new deal with Warner Bros. (finalized after this record), Say Anything will eventually graduate to a major label. No surprise, as the band is reminiscent of everything from Blink-182 to Straylight Run. Don't write them off yet; about half of these 13 pop-punk songs feature lively arrangements that take a few unexpected turns. (TM)

Doghouse, PO Box 8946 Toledo, OH 43623, www.doghouserecords.com

Scrubs, The – Return To The Basement, CDEP

Underground pop-punk is in trouble when great bands like Cincinnati's The Scrubs feel the need to break up. Luckily they got back together and recorded a few new songs and compiled them with their last unreleased material to release this solid EP of East Bay-style early '90s pop. (AE)

Nice Guy, PO Box 42815, Cincinnati, OH 45242, www.niceguyrecords.com

Scurvy – Swim With The Sharks, CD

The concept is cool: Write a bunch of youth-crew songs with all the lyrics centered around pirates. These guys have a good sense of humor in this project. Nothing is too serious, but the music is just more "tough guy" hardcore with basic breakdowns. A bit disappointing. (TK)

Self-released, www.piratehardcore.net

The Sea, The Sea – S/T, 12"

Artsy post-hardcore/DC indie rock with male and female vocals. The title track features simultaneous vocals, which I've never been a fan of, as they can be distracting. The latter two songs are a little cleaner, featuring both sung and spoken vocals, but do little to redeem the record as a whole. (BN)

Neon Boombox, 505 Washtenaw Rd. Ypsilanti, MI 48197, www.unshadowed.com/the-diaper/neonboombox.html

Seneca – Existe, CDEP

Taking cues from the experimental alt-metal of Open Hand and the atmospheric noodling of The Mars Volta, Seneca have a unique EP when they aren't just copying Omar and Cedric. This EP is a solid introduction to the band, but I'd be curious to see if their next release has more self-expression. (MS)

Radar, PO Box 1205 Allston, MA 02134, www.raddarecordings.com

Sense Of Purpose – Tomorrow's Too Late, CD

This is Australian hardcore at its most generic. The booklet shows them wearing all the right T-shirts and jumping around just right, but the music is so mediocre that the feelings didn't translate—just another bland sXe band. (TK)

Go-Team, PO Box 5030, Hughesdale, Victoria, Australia 3166, www.go-teamrecords.com

Sexaphone – S/T, 7"

Sexaphone is garage chant stripped to the bare essentials so that the songs sound more like mantras. The titles, like "My Baby Don't Like Nobody (But Me)," get overlaid with endless simple, art-damaged melodies until you can't help but twist and turn the words. Deconstruction and shit. (DAL)

Self-released, midnighttosix@hotmail.com

Setting Sun – Math And Magic, CD

Setting Sun plays C-rate indie pop, tangled in campy songwriting and sloppy playing. The vocal work and harmonized aspects (which stir up distant reminders of Elliott Smith) are commendable at times, but the tacky construction and overall lack of musicianship hinder the band from being anything worthy of praise. (BM)

Self-released, www.settingsun.cc

Shadow Of A Great Name – Exteriors, CD

Shadow Of A Great Name are an instrumental trio that successfully aim to create a specific atmosphere for each song. Some are upbeat while most are spacey, mixing sound effects with guitar, bass and drums. (SJ)

Self-released, www.soagn.com

Shakedown, The – S/T, CD

In the lead of Hives clones are the Shakedown, with ace producer Jack Endino twisting the knobs. Don't get me wrong; they rock and they roll, with the sound and gusto of a band ready to be heard between quarters at the ball game. Slick, high-quality rock your cup of tea? Drink up. (EA)

Morphius Records, 100 E. 23rd St., Baltimore, MD 21218, www.morphius.com

Shellshag – S/T, CD

Another man/woman combo trying to shake things up by playing lo-fi garage rock without a bass player. No Cymbals? No way! Stop me if you think that you've heard this one before. (MS)

Starcleaner, PO Box 410622 San Francisco, CA 94141, www.starcleaner.com

Shemps, The – Spazz Out With..., CD

This un-hip NYC combo plays some badass garage punk rock. The songs are simple and catchy, the band is cranking, and the singer has a great throaty scream. *Spazz Out With The Shemps* is party music for drunks and miscreants, and I'm so there. (JC)

Reservation, 7101 SE Reed College Place, Portland, OR 97202, www.rezrecs.com

☿ Sheryl's Magnetic Aura / Rapider Than Horsepower – split, 7"

Indiana's Rapider Than Horsepower have an ethereal quality that comes across in the airy guitar work, lispy vocals, and slack melodies; and then in "Clever Disguise" in the form of haunting whispers echoing the vocals. Sheryl's Magnetic Aura, a New York group featuring members of Books Lie, start their side with a fantastic song complete with swirling guitars, an anthemic, singalong chorus, and alternating hazy breakdowns and stark staccato fast parts that works off each other really well. Their second song is more like a series of miniature explosions, all tight drum rolls and the kind of controlled-fury guitar strumming that always sounds to me like the hands are racing to keep up with the brain's grand scheme. All in all a pretty great 7". (DAL)

Neon Boombox, 505 Washtenaw Rd., Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Shikari – 1999-2003, CD

Having never heard of Shikari when they were around, I didn't expect this release to impress me as much as it did. In the same vein as Orchid, Shikari play dark, melodic screamo with personal and political lyrics, including explanations. There is plenty of emotion behind this music. (TK)

Level Plane, PO Box 7926, Charlottesville, VA 22906, www.level-plane.com

☿ Shindig – This Beginning Is Your End, CD

The misogynist undertones of emo are just lately beginning to surface

Reviewer spotlight: Sean Moeller (SM)

Jonny Polonsky, *Hi, My Name Is Jonny*. How Jonny Polonsky played such a sizable role in my musical development, at a time when I was taking high school physics and unaware there was music out there that sounded nothing like Primus, is an utter fucking mystery. He was my first Evan Dando and paved the way for John Darnielle. I was no more familiar with the bottomless directory of singer-songwriters as I was with the ingredients of a screwdriver or the hangover recovery tips that would come in handy later on. His voice stepped slow-motion-like through my ears as Neil Armstrong did the surface of the moon—one small step for man, one giant leap for Devendra Banhart. What's more startling is that, to this day, I still don't have anyone in my circle of friends or associates who has ever heard of him or his evil, scurvy love. I saw a live, online performance he did three years ago at Schuba's in Chicago. That corner bar was sold-out and full of followers that went ape-shit for him when he appeared with guitar. It was nice knowing there were more of me. People who recognized Polonsky's simple and wistfully smart songs of masochistic amour were the stuff of dreams.

Current occupations: Mates of State, *All Day EP*; Rufus Wainwright, *Want Two*; Split Lip Rayfield, *Should Have Seen It Coming*; V/A, *The Life Aquatic* soundtrack; William Elliott Whitmore, *Ashes To Dust*; The Comas, *Conductor*.

in a more literal context, usually under the playful guise of violence or, as the press release for *This Beginning Is Your End* states, "murder-core." Through nine painfully monotonous acoustic whine fests, Richie Ray of Shindig callously bitchs and moans about how terribly he's been wronged by his anonymous partner. Ray's solution to the problem? Violence! Using vague metaphors, Ray warns his jilted lover throughout about how she's going to "choke on her words" and that "this time we all die." Whether the protagonist in this story is hurting himself or others is often unclear, but ultimately the fault is placed solely on the female. "I hope you're proud to know what you've done," laments Ray in "You Put The F In Friendship." However Shindig likes to justify it, this record comes across as nothing more than an area for Ray to display his own misdirected passive aggression against females while serving as another illustration of Jessica Hopper's growing argument against these crybabies. (MS) Undecided, 1213 N. D St., Lake Worth, FL 33460, www.undecidedrecords.com

Shortstack - S/T, CD

Yes! Creepy country-blues smothered in that sense of impending doom from above and pleasures of the flesh from below known as "Southern Gothic." Slide guitars, two-note bass lines, jump-blues beats and moonshine-drenched vocals. Shortstack definitely has an "old-timey" feel, but it's not forced. They've recognized, and tapped into, the qualities of old-school stuff like Ernest Tubbs, Lightnin' Hopkins, and Leadbelly that made that music sound so raw and powerful. They do a few traditional numbers like "Trouble In Mind" that you wouldn't really be able to distinguish from their originals. They're that good at writing murder ballads. Plus the hidden track is a juke-joint style cover of Motorhead's "Ace Of Spades." Now that Trailer Bride broke up, I'm looking toward these dudes to pick up the button and go for the gold. (A) Planaria, PO Box 21340, Washington, DC 20009, www.planariainc.com

Shuriken - Evacuate / Disintegrate, CDEP

This lies somewhere along the lines of New Found Glory or old Saves The Day, but not as bad. The vocals are very similar, but the music is pretty upbeat and catchy without sounding generic. The singer has a very pleasant singing voice that occasionally has its abrasive moments. (NS) You And Whose Army?, PO Box 34398, London, NW6 4XT, UK, www.yawarecords.com

Shy Child - One With The Sun, CD

Any band that lyrically samples Rob Base and DJ EZ Rock's "Joy And Pain" the way Shy Child does is out to have fun. The duo's first record, *Please Consider Our Time* (2002), solicited comparisons to Rush from every overzealous bullshitter on the block looking to kiss yet more Brooklyn ass, but Pete Cafarella (El Guapo) and Nate Smith (Touchdown, El Guapo), though lovers of prog rock, never seemed to have their musical goals centered around it. Sure enough, their follow up LP is a raucous collection of dance tracks for hipsters who'd otherwise be too cool to shake it in public. Treble-heavy synths skate over drums and guitar, creating a unified melodic buzz that's warmed by the classic Britpop vocal style: the urgent croon. It's not revolutionary dance music, but it is wicked fun. (CC) Say Hey, E. 14th St. #229, New York, NY 10003, www.sayheyrecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: (Mr.) Dana Morse (DM)

Basehead, *Play With Toys*. During the early '90s, hip hop became dominated by what sold, and rap stopped being original for the most part. Hip-hop acts like De La Soul, Del Tha Funky Homo Sapien, Arrested Development, and the Wu-Tang Clan stood out from the crowd and found some success at this time. Basehead, though, even stood out from the bands that stood out—they were that far from the norm. This all-live group (plus DJ) focused on the comedy of everyday life, being down on your luck, in general and with women. Frontman Michael Ivey had a flow that resembled a Southerner who moonlighted as a lounge singer backed by a group of the same description. His voice was both compassionate and melancholy and painted imagery that would drive you to drink. This record may have been the first emo-rap record that inspired trip hop and acts like Portishead and Lovage. Who knows, but this is one of the hippest records that will make you laugh and make your friends say, "What the hell are you listening to? This is awesome!" Sure it may not be very punk rock, but this broke new ground 13 years ago. Even now, it still strikes a chord.

What I'm rocking these days: Isis, Panopticon; Mos Def, *New Danger*; Alice Donut, *Three Sisters*; Death From Above 1979; Hot Snakes, *Audit In Progress*; Blood Brothers, *Crimes*; Swing Kids; Placebo; Swiz; Matthew Shipp.

Reviewer Spotlight: Brian Moss (BM)

Karp, *Suplex*. If I were a real badass, Karp would be my choice listen for drunken Harley garage repairs or kid-beating milk-money robberies. Fortunately, for you, me and all the motorcycles and children in the world, I'm about as rugged as a sleepy kitten purring in the arms of a high-society grandmother. However, upon listening to Karp I am thrust into alter-life fantasies of bounty hunting and cannabis-induced catastrophes. Their megasaurus drop-tuned antics make many of today's Sabbath-obsessed, bearded rockers seem petty. More importantly, as made apparent by songs about pie, math and roller derbies, Karp's tongue-in-cheek cynicism bring unrestrained fun and mockery to a sound that is often synonymous with stern pretension. Steadfast and hasty in combining boyhood monster-rock idolizations with the wit and ridicule of punk, Karp has a relatively short existence, but marked it with some damn fine music. If greasy wrenches, cheap beer and evil are your thing, well then Karp is probably right up your alley. Or, if you, like myself, have a penchant for scale-busting, ear-shattering walls of rockage, but weren't naturally made to be a grizzled rebel, Karp should also please your needs. Upon the dismantling of the band, ex-members moved on to play in the Tight Bros From Way Back When and the Whip, both of which are also worth the listen.

Essential party jams: Candy Man, "Knockin' The Boots"; Gucci Crew II, "Sally 'That Girl'"; Boyz From The Bottom, "Boom I Got Your Girlfriend"; Digital Underground, "Freaks Of The Industry"; L'Trimm, "Cars That Go Boom."

Sick Of It All - Outtakes For The Outcast, CD

I've never really been one, but fans should take note of the compilation tracks, b-sides, and unreleased cuts that make up this brief rarities disc. Interestingly, there's a DJ Lethal remix from 1992 of "Just Look Around" over a portion of House of Pain's "It Ain't A Crime" that features Everlast. (DH) Fat Wreck Chords, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119, www.fatwreck.com

Silencio - Dead Kings, CD

Silencio are a hard instrumental outfit that experiments with fury and more contemplative moods. This band is multitalented and the changes they engage are numerous and can happen in an instant, going from jazz to math-rock to metallish chords, and they make the changes as fluidly as a left-hand turn. (BA)

The Mountain Collective for Independent Artists, PO Box 1543, Manhattanville Post Office, New York, NY 10027, www.mtnclia.com

Silver Sunshine - S/T, CD

Once we've got them focused, Silver Sunshine is a welcome extension of their idols. As a debut, this self-titled disc is a breezy collage, toasting around its edges with a western psychedelia that's delivered as a British ventriloquist. It's airy and soft and does best when the band play the straight men instead of goosing every guitar line into a prime example of overdoing it. When contained, this California band and this record give hope for a renewed wave of mop-top fireworks. (SM) WishingTree, www.wishingtreerecords.com

Simply Waiting - The Subtle Dynamics Between The Windshield and The Rearview, CD

We all have our opinions about what Dashboard Confessional has meant to the world. Most of us believe it's very little, but we can all agree that Chris Fella sure brought hyper-sentimentality back into vogue. And for that, Simply Waiting is thankful. This Ohioan five-piece could get confused for a less lovable DC. (SM)

A Small Voice Screams World, PO Box 38, Vandalia, OH 45377, www.asmallvoicescreamsworld.com

Sinkin' Ships - Mayday, CD

Naomi Allen croons confidently and liltily even as the hardcore cacophony underneath her builds to a thunder. Some memorable riffs from Jamey "Cactus" Vella, Allen's old 2 Pump Louie bandmate, also stand out on this very solid record from the Toronto fivesome. (DAL)

Wounded Paw, 26C Brookfield St., Toronto, ON M6J 3A9, Canada, www.woundedpaw.com

Six Bullet Plan, The - So Far Away From Better Days, CD

Raging German hardcore that totally sounds like they're from Boston. The vocalist sounds almost exactly like Wes from American Nightmare. The music here is Boston-style hardcore with a darker edge. I'm going to have to compare them to American Nightmare or Bane. Not a bad listen, but nothing new. (KM)

Rockstar, Kurbrennenstrasse 32-36, 52066 Aachen, Germany, www.rockstarrecords.de

Sixgun Radio - Please Press Me, CD

Angry NYC punk with touches of both melodic hardcore and street to punch things up a bit. The sociopolitical writing provides even more urgency than

the assertive guitars and hard-hitting drumming, giving this record fuel to burn for the duration. Sadly, Sixgun Radio broke up this past July. (BN) Bankshot, www.bankshotrecords.com

Skates - Lord Of The Rinks, CD

Mincing hip-hop aesthetics and electronica beats with a squeaky female MC from outer space, Skates' style is unique, but its anxious timing and high-pitch tone get tedious fast. (CC)

Unschool'd, 1289 North Fordham Blvd., Suite 222, Chapel Hill, NC 27514, www.unschool'd.com

Skating Club - The Unfound Sound, CD

Singer-songwriter Aubrey Anderson has created music that sounds so much like John Meyer that I couldn't help but think of Jennifer Love Hewitt while listening to the lovelorn songs. If you like those kind of acoustic, fratboy love songs, then you'll dig this. It just triggers my gag reflex. (LW) Kimchee, 6 Sagamore Road, Ipswich MA 01938, www.kimcheerecords.com

Skulls - Night Of The Living Skulls, CD/DVD

Singer Billy Bones is back with a new release 20 years after their debut. After two studio records, this time it's a live CD/DVD, and the quality is unbelievable. I don't think the Skulls were underrated, but compared to many come-back '70s bands, this is great straight-up punk. (EA) Finger Records, www.squareworldfilms.com

Sleepytime Gorilla Museum - Sleepytime Gorilla Museum Of Natural History, CD

Welcome to the Pleasure-Doom. Instead of being oriented to the past, this Museum of Natural History is part insane asylum displaying a study of the species human. At one point, an objective voice calmly suggests "Let us never forget that the human race with technology is like an alcoholic with a barrel of wine." The music is varied with each display, an eclectic hardcore that finds violins and recorders dueling metallic guitars and basses or who knows what else. They seem to use the handyman's approach to sound, bringing any available noisemakers to their cacophony, even frog croaks, bug noises, snores. This concept album sounds like an acidic Danny Elfman soundtrack for a strange science documentary. Some of the many vocals can be irritating, but that's part of the multifaceted approach. It's intelligent, talented and interesting, but you do have to be into, or prepared for, this oracle. (BA) Mimicry, www.webofmimicry.com

SloMo Rabbit Kick - Hortatory Examinations, CDEP

Caring about the rigid riffs, good drum sound, quirky flourishes and fake accents on this five-song indie-pop EP is tough when the singing is so listless. Jay Chilcote's lyrics rise above his monotone only on the political bright spot "This Long Parade." Come on, man, sing like you mean it. (JM) Kittybox, PO Box 30712, Seattle, WA 98113, www.slomorabbitkick.com

Smalltown - The Music, CD

Sweden's Smalltown are one of the catchier pop-punk bands going today, with hook-driven, melodious, catchy songs with a '77 punk feel lurking just beneath a fundamental '90s pop formula. Smalltown amazingly keeps pop-punk sounding fresh. *The Music* is also available on LP, where



it must sound even more incredible. (AE)

Deranged, c/o Gordon Dufresne, 1166 Chaster Road, Gibsons BC, V0N 1V4, www.derangedrecords.com

☛ **Smith, Elliott – From A Basement On The Hill, CD**

Reviewing Smith's latest record while ignoring his unexpected death in 2003 is an impossible task. How can you simply focus on the music itself without thinking of his bizarre death, especially when there's an heartbreaking appropriate song like "A Fond Farewell" on it? The trick is not to beatify this, his ostensible last will and testament. Although it's an excellent, poignant album, Smith's death prevented it from being fully completed. Originally intended to be a double disc, *From A Basement* was essentially completed by friends, with his family selecting the songs. While songs like the opener, "Coast To Coast," sound full and lush, others, such as "The Last Hour," seem incomplete. But the record doesn't have a half-baked feel to it. The guitar foundation of the songs (acoustic, distorted, clean) often has elaborate accompaniment, as in "Coast To Coast," "Don't Go Down" and "King's Crossing." Piano, organ, percussion and various noises fill out songs. In the case of "Coast To Coast," the effect is positively ominous; there's darkness in a song that would otherwise sound relatively poppy. Smith was definitely attempting to expand his sound on this record, and when the songs are complete, they sound amazing (see the three songs just mentioned). Lyrically, the album is full of Smith's trademark self-lacerating lyrics that resonate a profound sense of pain. With his intimate delivery, Smith sounds almost confessional in the songs. *From A Basement On The Hill* is both achingly brilliant and lamentably incomplete—a sad trait shared by the work of other artists whose lives ended way too early. (KR)

Anti-, 2798 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90026, www.anti.com

☛ **Smoke And Smoke – Love Suffers Long, CD**

Featuring Spencer Moody (Murder City Devils) on vocals, Mike Kunka (godheadSilo, Dead Low Tide) on bass and Dan Haugh (godheadSilo, Dirty Knives) on drums, Smoke And Smoke delivers just what you'd expect: short tracks with fast riffs that serve up the raucous rock with a filthy, punk swagger that we love. (CC)

Frenchkiss, 111 E. 14th St., Suite 229, New York, NY 10003, www.frenchkissrecords.com

☛ **So L'il – Revolution Thumpin', CD**

Get this group a lead singer. As producers, Ben Malkin, and Evan Sobel create Air-y robot sex music, trashy pop and Eno atmospheres. When Malkin's on the mic, however, tricky words tend to trip his tongue. So L'il is so much better on the seven tracks featuring various chanteuses. (JM)

Self-released, www.solil.net

☛ **Solyoni – Prairie Monsters, CD**

A self-proclaimed "road record," this album was conceived as two of the band's members drove from Akron, Ohio, to Seattle, Wash., on a mission to deliver a Honda Accord full of personal belongings to one their girlfriends, who had recently moved to the West Coast. The resulting album sounds as if it were inspired by boredom—silly lyrics and goofy road stories that can only come from spending a little too much time with someone in a small car, eating only plums and peanut-butter crackers. It all just comes off like an inside joke. But the backing music is actually really good—nice twangy, acoustic guitar-driven tunes that invoke an on-the-road kind of feel. (LW)

Self-released, www.solyoni.com

☛ **Something About Vampires And Sluts – We Break Our Own Hearts, CD**

There are few things more instinctually entertaining than a sleaze-rock

band. Something About Vampires And Sluts have added some new members and put a nice synth polish on their sound's rough, punk edges while (luckily) maintaining the lusty lyrics and groin-grinding rhythms that make them appealing. (CC)

VMS, 100 E. 23rd St., Baltimore, MD 21218, www.morphus.com

☛ **Sometree – Moleskine, CD**

It's always a bit of a copout to dismiss a record as "nothing new" or "like everything else," but sometimes it's all a reviewer has to go on. Take Sometree's *Moleskine* for instance. A far cry from the frenetic hardcore one would expect from Magic Bullet, Sometree are a sincere, moody emotional rock band with *Moleskine* sounding like a collection of songs Penfold would have made had they gotten a little bit more sun. That said, Sometree fails to distinguish themselves from the hundreds other bands that sound exactly like this, leaving me, the reviewer, to sound as bland and uninspired as the music. Way to make us both look bad, guys. (MS)

Magic Bullet, 17 Argyle Hills Dr., Fredricksburg, VA 22405, www.magicbulletrecords.com

☛ **Son, Ambulance – Key, CD**

Drenched with delayed keyboards and bedroom vocals, Son, Ambulance's latest release is one pop class and tasteful diversity. The influences of both Americana indie and British pop are clearly present, as well is the unmistakable melodic mark of Omaha, but Son, Ambulance easily manages to up the stakes, holding their own in complexity and heavy layering. Spacey effects, '70s-tinged rockers and hints of grassroots all have their place on this 50-plus-minute keeper. In yet another justification of all the hype surrounding Saddle Creek, Key has got the lock down on textured ballads and good old-fashion pop charm. (BM)

Saddle Creek, PO Box 8554, Omaha, NE, 68108-0554, www.saddle-creek.com

☛ **Sonic Love Affair – S/T, 2x7"**

Borrowing from classic rock, '70s punk, and a bit of hardcore, Sacramento's SLA delivers two originals and two covers on this classy release recorded by the much-respected Chris Woodhouse. This double 7" is a rare post-punk garage release that works, serving up maturity while remaining vibrant. (AE)

Dollar Record, 332 Fell St. #2, San Francisco, CA 94102, www.dollarrecordrecords.com

☛ **S.O.S. – S/T, CDEP**

I first saw a unicorn on the cover of SOS's debut release, and all I could think of was: "Shit, I hate fucking emo." Surprise, surprise. This happens to be a whole lot better and a whole lot more exciting. This is reminiscent of old DC hXc, especially when it got more melodic in the mid-'80s. Their band compares itself to Black Cross, but I hear Swiz. If you even think about asking who Swiz is, go do some homework. But right now, we're talking about SOS. This is hXc the way it should be: straight up, with smart, aggro lyrics. There's something for the punk kids, the rock kids and something for those who appreciate just great stuff. Sure the guitars rip, but the guitarists can play more than power cords. The rhythm section grooves, but more importantly, the drums are occasionally used as an instrument instead of a rhythm device. The vocals are shouting to you instead of at you. All hail SOS—these kids know how to rock out with their tallywackers out. (DM)

Perfect Victim, PO Box 52084, Boston, MA 02205, www.perfectvictim.com

☛ **Son Of The Mourning – Forest Bank, CDEP**

Insane British hardcore! The music is seriously crazy—intensely fast, techy metal insanity that's just a bit too much all over the frets. The fast parts break down into slower, melodic and emotive sing-song parts. I'd be much more interested to listen to the hardcore madness with no emo

breakdowns. (MG)

Engineer, 210 William St., Boonton, NJ 07005, www.engineerrecords.com

☛ **Sourkeys, The – S/T, CD**

Canada's answer to Q And Not U debuts a delicate balance of dance-friendly indie with crunching post-punk. On this tight wire, the band performs acrobatic feats of sweeping dynamics and disciplined collaborative efforts. Amazing call-and-response vocal pop and the occasional cowbell round out the mix. (VC)

Ford Plant Recording Co., 1 King St., Brantford, ON N3T 3C2, Canada, www.thefordplant.ca

☛ **Southern Way, The – S/T, CD**

If you have to play street punk at least have the decency to mix it up a little like these guys. All the lame street-punk signposts like shouted choruses are there, but there's enough stripped rock 'n' roll and rockabilly to somewhat salvage the music. (RR)

Rebellion, Engstoeep 57–5246, BD Rosmalen, The Netherlands, www.rebellionrecords.nl

☛ **Spades, The – Learnin' The Hard Way, CD**

Are they a joke band, or are they for real? More pertinently, does it really matter if they're for real or not? The Spades are a brutal and cruel garage punk band from Holland, composed exclusively of Afro-European members. On *Learnin' The Hard Way*, they deliver the sleazy goods, with socially relevant songs such as "C'mon Baby," "Random Violence," "Hurt You Again" and "Gotta Get Some." This CD reminds me a lot of the new release from The Jabbers, also reviewed this issue. The Spades know how to balance sexual humor with tact, rock 'n' roll with cheese, and garage rock convention with modern punk demands. The end result is a CD that practically anyone into straightforward punk will enjoy. Kudos go out to Go-Kart for taking a chance on an excellent band that might otherwise suffer from obscurity, at least Stateside. (AE)

Go-Kart, PO Box 20, Prince Street Station, New York, NY 10012, www.gokartrecords.com

☛ **Spits, The – 19 Million A.C. EP, CD**

What could I possibly say about The Spits that could even slightly explain their genius? This is a collection of 7" and comp tracks. Let me clarify that this is not an EP, as the artwork would lead you to believe. The Spits have a style that reminds me of the simplicity of the Ramones coupled with the lyrics of GG and the Jabbers. Add some random, silly keyboard riffs in place of guitar solos, and they have a sound like no one else. The highlight of this release, besides their cover of "Drink, Fight, & Fuck," is the alternate version of "Let Us Play Your Party" with the lyrics "When we're puking on the rug / you're gonna wanna be pulling the plug / we're gonna hang around 'til six / then you're sister's gonna suck our dicks / kicking holes in the walls / kick your dog in the balls." You can't compete on any level with these guys. They could possibly be the most poignant band of this millennium. (TK)

Dirtnap, PO Box 21249, Seattle WA 98111, www.dirtnaprecs.com

☛ **Split Fifty – We Live Forever, CD**

These folks from PA did their homework and even got the extra credit points: This is great-sounding punk rock that is both tough and melodic, without it getting poppy. This is a band that can float between the tribes of hXc and punk and please everyone. Sure, the cover of the record looks like flash tattoo art for a Alkaline Trio fan, but don't let that fool you. This release rocks your socks from beginning to end with the band's tight as hell playing, hard grooves, breakdowns, aggressive lead vocals with equally matched backing vocals—sorry, I'm just going on and on. But it really is refreshing to hear a band harness their skills before rushing into

Reviewer Spotlight: Bart Niedziakowski (BN)

V/A, *They Don't Get Paid, They Don't Get Laid, But Boy Do They Work Hard*. Over the past few years, two of punk's most revered subcultures have slowly begun to deteriorate: vinyl and zines. This decline in both quality and quantity of said media is as sad as it is unavoidable. With the price of consumer-level CD recorders continuing on a steady decline, more bands are turning to CDRs as opposed to tapes or vinyl. In fact, vinyl releases have become an afterthought in today's scene, whereas once they were the scene. Likewise, the advent of the e-zine and the skyrocketing publishing costs have led to more and more quality print zines closing shop in favor of a much cheaper alternative: the web. Is it any wonder then that a feeling of sentimental longing led me to uncover my prized copy of one of the finest chapters in the *MRR* compilation stable? This was one of the first compilations to recognize and promote the DIY ethic. Special care went into selecting bands and zines that represented this idea, and the end result contains classic song contributions by the likes of Nausea, Christ On A Crutch, Downfall (Tim Armstrong's post Op Ivy, pre-Rancid project), Screaching Weasel, Dissent, Cringer, and Jawbox, as well as written contributions from some of the finest zines of the yesteryear, namely *Endless Struggle*, *Hippycore*, *Time To Unite* and *Profane Existence*. A great record for reminiscing.

Recent Reckless splurges: V/A, *Riot Ska*; Morning Glory, *Whole World Is Watching*; Screaching Weasel, *Pervo Devo*; Strike Anywhere, *Underground Europe 2001*; V/A, *Turn It Around!*

a first full-length. Also, this proves that good bands play the now over-hyped and super-sized Warped Tour. Unfortunately this is the first record I reviewed for this issue, and I feel I may have done the best one first. I'll just listen to it again when I'm done, and everything will be fine. But seriously, you can both circle dance and finger point to this one. Best of both worlds! (DM)

Hell Bent, PO Box 1529 Point Pleasant Beach, NJ 08742, www.hellbentrecords.com

Stage Bottles – New Flag, CD

Saxophone solos and easy-listening pop tunes add variety to Stage Bottles' crisply produced punk. Just don't listen to every word. Although the band balances wisdom and sarcasm and presents positive skinhead politics, some lyrics are so trite they call to mind mainstream one-hit wonder Chumbawamba. All right. (JM)

Insurgence, 2 Bloor St. W., Suite 100-184, Toronto, Ontario, M4W 3E2 Canada, www.insurgence.net

Stalin's War – Rebirth From Flames, CD

Angry, tough hardcore with female vocals. There are some slower, more melodic songs, but mostly it's just a carbon copy of any late '90s Victory Records band. Nothing special. (TK)

Self-released, 901 Pellegrini St, Santa Cruz, CA 95062, www.stalinswar.org

Stand Against – Until The End, CD

Contrived name, bad title, but this is one fucking solid debut. Taking mainly from '80s NYHC like Sick Of It All or Agnostic Front, Stand Against updates their sound with a more modern hardcore filter. Sweet youth-crow chants backs some seriously awesome vocal work. (VC)

My Own Wallet, 11233 Arroyo Ave., Hesperia, CA 92345, www.myownwallet.com

Stations – Tune Out The Static, CD

Stations play straight-up punk with a '90s pop-punk buried in there somewhere to keep things catchy. The vocals are buried, and the mixing sounds so flat that I tried to remove cotton from my ears but didn't find any. (EA)

Self-released, www.thisisstations.com

Stick Boy – Sumo, CD

This is the same insipid, piss-poor, Ramones-copped bullshit I get every month. The fucking Ramones were idiot savants. They had an amazing knack for writing fucked-up Doc Pomus pop songs over amphetamine-propelled "Sister Ray" distortion. The genius of rock 'n' roll is that anyone can do it. Conversely, it's also its major vice. (RL)

Consul, consul-records@wanadoo.fr

Stiletto's, The – Making History By Repeating It, CD

Wild and wooly rock action from this Dutch trio. It's pounding and primal like the Oblivians or the Blacks. As the album title suggests, they're not trying to break any new ground. But they do kick up a pretty good racket

for the kids of today to get into. (JC)

Stardumb, PO Box 21145, 3001 AC Rotterdam, the Netherlands, www.stardumbrecords.com

Still Life Projector – The Dance Riot, CD

Imbued with that glassy sheen, the packaging of this album is pretty much on cue with the record itself. Half-naked, air brushed blonde = humdrum, watered down, post-hardcore. The songwriting sounds uninspired, the rhythms dull, and the guitars indistinct. Note: The Dance Riot will neither induce dancing nor a riot. (AJA)

Rise, PO Box 135, Roseburg, OR 97470, www.riserecords.com

Stockyard Stoics – Catastrophe, CD

Immediately I hear an East Coast punk sound with lyrics well worth reading. Once you get past the Stiff Little Fingers filtered through Rancid sound, you will start to dig the Stockyard Stoics. The songs are catchy enough that I listened to this way more than expected. (EA)

Bankshot Records www.bankshotrecords.com

Stranded Ships – White Lights Begin, CD

This CD sounds horrible, like some early four-track recording by Sea Saw's Trevor Holland. The drum miking is amazing, but it's only one drum. There is no glue that holds it together, and interesting recording ideas don't make good music by themselves. (DI)

Bad Bunny Records, 52 Strickland Lane, Ardmore, TN 38449

Strangers, The – S/T, CD

This noisy alt-bluegrass is boring on the slow tunes and too jumbled on the fast ones. The really pretentious lyrics try way too hard to be "dark," and it just sounds unnatural. (AJ)

Self-released, www.strangersonly.com

Strikeforce Diablo – The Albatross And The Architect, CD

Strikeforce Diablo play melodic post-punk that's strikingly reminiscent of Small Brown Bike. Bands that manage to keep their power and intensity while still writing interesting parts always score points with me. Although it starts to sound a bit repetitious toward the middle, this is still a solid effort overall. (KR)

No Idea, PO Box 14636, Gainesville, FL 32604, www.noidearecords.com

Strines, The – Doggerel, CD

Australian vocalist Georgia Haeghe has major commercial potential. Her powerful voice makes this rugged pop album stick out as a key debut that could possibly make the Strines superstars, which is what I think they're going for, judging by the production. (AE)

I.N.S., 39 West 14th Street, New York, NY 10011, www.ins-records.com

Struction – 13 Minutes Of Love And Doom, CDEP

Struction is a noise-core outfit with math-rock precision and timing, belting out pieces a minute or two long. There are the dueling vocals of Meira

Sonin and David Podrid and the staccato drumming of Paul Hill, all of which give this EP such a fresh sound. Damn good. (BA)

Moreaster Failed Industries, 2406 Phillips Drive, Alexandria, VA 22306, www.nflabel.com

Strung Out – Exile In Oblivion, CD

Strung Out has always had their metal influences and indulged them in the past, but on their newest album, they've pretty much crossed over, and the results are pretty awesome. They're flexing their metal muscles like never before, resulting in some straight-up power metal and thrash-metal songs, complete with wailing solos. Song two, "Blueprint Of The Fall," would fit on a few classic Iron Maiden or Judas Priest albums, musically. A few songs could possibly be mistaken for nu metal territory, but Strung Out is way too talented to dumb down their music enough to fit that scene. This is still a band that challenges itself to write great songs without simplifying them in any way. The vocals seem to be the only constant with this band. Although they've subtly changed over the years, Jason's vocals are as intensely melodic and dynamic as ever. I understand how people can grow past certain styles of music (maybe pop punk), but Strung Out has grown right along with you, if not past you, whippersnapper! (NS)

Fat Wreck, PO Box 193690, San Francisco, CA 94119, www.fatwreck.com

Styrofoam – Nothing's Lost, CD

A pop-electronic brainchild of some guy named Arne Van Petegem, this CD features all sorts of guests, but most people will buy this because BEN GIB-BARD TOTALLY SINGS ON THIS OMG! For the most part, the songs are all pretty good, but someone needs to put a leash on this laptop craze. (DH)

Morr Music, postfach 550141, 10371 Berlin, Germany, www.morrmusic.com

Submission Hold – What Holds Back The Envelope, CD

Jen Throwup gives these activist Canadians a singer who tackles each song as if it's a piece in an off-Broadway anarchist musical. Soaring and operatic in one second, she'll pounce on the band's jazzy guitar excursions in the next, and then later on she'll strut like a vamp. At times, this is invigorating noise rock, and at other times, this is little more than liberal-arts pretension. Yet Submission Hold can be a frustratingly compelling act. The band's literate, political approach is gripping, but too often they'll let the songs disintegrate into "oh so clever" musicianship. The veterans have been approaching punk like an improvised jazz group for a while now, but recent political developments will hopefully help in recruiting a fan base. (TM)

G7 Welcoming Committee, PO Box 27006 360 Main Street Concourse, Winnipeg, MB R5C 4T3, Canada, www.g7welcomingcommittee.com

Suicide Note – Too Sick To Dance, CD

Channeling the spirit of mid-'90s San Diego bands like Tanner, Jehu, or aMiniature, Suicide Note incorporates some modern hardcore influences. The vocals are mostly chanted in cheerleader-like pace, with catchy gui-

Reviewer Spotlight: Missy Paul (MP)

V/A, If I Were A Carpenter. It was by mistake, a mistake called Columbia House, I received this tribute album, and I was immediately disappointed. After all, I was a freshman in high school, busy watching *Alternative Nation*. I thought The Carpenters were a mushy duo who sang about birds and love. I would've thrown the thing away, but the *Alternative Nation*-friendly bands stopped me. Upon first listen, I was blown away. These songs weren't sappy, but full of sadness, regret and longing—in other words, perfect for my teenage angst. I was hooked. Even now, the album still captures me. It begins with "Goodbye To Love," covered by American Music Club, one of the saddest songs I've ever heard. With the lingering organ and melancholy twinge, it seems to be precisely how the song was meant to be played. Other heartbreakers on the album are "Solitaire" by Sheryl Crow, Cracker's sparse version of "Rainy Days And Mondays" and Matthew Sweet's "Let Me Be The One." The best track is Sonic Youth's feedback-laden rendition of "Superstar." The song, about "rock star" obsession, is desperate, haunting and incredibly creepy. With the exception of a few missteps, including the Cranberries and 4 Non Blondes, this tribute is mostly flawless, capturing the passion and beauty of each song, and I can't imagine not having it in my collection. I guess it was a good thing I wanted to get 12 CDs for a penny.

This is what I'm diggin': Bright Eyes, *Lua/Take It Easy*; Juvenile, *Nolia Clap EP*; The Arcade Fire, *Funeral*; Squeeze, *Greatest Hits*; Jackie Greene, *Sweet Somewhere Bound*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Kyle Ryan (KR)

Superchunk, *No Pocky For Kitty*. This album came out when I was in high school, as I was discovering punk and indie music. Because it was one of the first records that I heard during that period, it's an album that resonates with me nearly 15 years after its release. It was Superchunk's second record, but the one that put the North Carolina band on the map. *No Pocky* was indie rock before the moniker really came into fashion in the '90s, but the band was post-punk in the sense that they used punk's guitar-based power with strong hooks to make dizzily catchy songs. Track two, "Seed Toss," epitomizes this, with a guitar hook in the verse that solidified the song's legacy as the Superchunk archetype. *No Pocky* displays its punk influences prominently, as in "Skip Steps 1 & 3" and "Punch Me Harder," but in their later work, Superchunk proved dexterous with slower material as well. Songs "Sidewalk" and "Throwing Things" hint at that. Essentially, *No Pocky* was a small taste of what was to come. Superchunk absolutely ruled this style of music during the 1990s: melodic, powerful but moody, all of it catchy as hell. It was rock music informed by punk, but able to take chances most punk bands would eschew. Although their records the past few years have drifted away from the sound established by *No Pocky*, Superchunk will always be one of the most important bands ever to come from the indie scene.

Throwing things down at me: Kanye West, *The College Dropout*; The Arcade Fire, *Funeral*; Juno, *This Is The Way It Goes And Goes And Goes*; Slint, *Spiderland*; DJ Dangermouse, *The Grey Album*.



tar jabs. There are some mellow moments that work fine, but when they switch it up to hardcore, it wrecks a good thing. (NS)
Feret, 167 Wayne St. #409, Jersey City, NJ 07302, www.ferretstyle.com

Suit Of Lights – *Waking Up Is Good, 7"*

Suit Of Lights are like genre chameleons, splicing elements of metal, reggae, and Victory- and Revelation-flavored hardcore into a pretty listenable mix. It's a delicate balance, though, and it works better on the title track than on the bubblegum poppy b-side. (DAL)
Self-released, www.sulfolights.com

Sunrise – *Traces To Nowhere, CD*

This energetic Polish hardcore-oriented outfit is not beneath throwing in the occasional Slayer-esque metal riff from time to time. The opening track even tosses some blistering death-metal double-kick drums into the ensemble. Most of this album is catchy and incredibly fierce, and the vocalist has perfected the grunt/scream. (TG)
Lifeforce, www.lifeforcerecords.com

Supatones – *Unity Avenue, CD*

Melodic, hooky, ska-punk, all polished and ready for mass consumption—catchy stuff. They really shine on the slower, more reggae-tinged tracks like "Angel Fish." But it sounds like No Doubt, right down to the female lead vocals. (AJ)
Do The Dog Music, 26a Craven Road, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 5NE, UK, www.dothedog.com

Suspect Device – *A Moment's Notice, CD*

These guys call themselves Suspect Device, so is it any wonder their brand of street punk pays homage to the likes of Stiff Little Fingers? Dual guitars drive the upbeat melodies while gruff vocals deliver the lyrics with a punch, as demonstrated on "Common Ground" and "Before We're Through" (BN)
Self-released, www.suspectdevice.net

Sweet Cobra – *Praise, CD*

This heavy rockin' band straddles the line between hardcore and stoner rock. The screamed vocals get repetitive, unless you're totally into that. It'd be nice to hear more actual vocal melodies like they do on "Fear No Feather." But the riffs are tight, and within this genre, that's what really counts. (AJ)
Seventh Rule, 2303 W. Montrose, Floor One, Chicago, IL 60618, www.seventhrule.com

Swims, The – *Snackfood Junction, 7"* with CD included

Mixing peppy organ lines with politely rocking guitar riffs, The Swims play '60s-inspired guitar pop that doesn't take itself too seriously. They seem to be genuinely having fun playing their instruments. The smooth, choirboy vocals opening "In The Sun," as well as the slow playfulness of the closing song, are nice touches. (AJA)
Prison Jazz, 431 Birch Street, Scranton, PA 18505, www.prisonjazz.com

Swing Ding Amigos – *The Mongolita Chronicles, CD*

The band's name, album title, and cover artwork are downright confounding. Much easier to figure out is that this shit rocks. This Tucson trio plays raw, lightning-fast punk rock with sharp hooks and catchy vocal melodies that bring to mind (former) fellow desert-dwellers Scared Of Chaka. This is crazy good. (JC)
Rock N Roll Purgatory, PO Box 771153, Lakewood, OH 44107, www.rocknrollpurgatory.com; Wrong Hole, 8630 E. 26th Place, Tucson, AZ 85710

Talk To Plants – *Casual Living, CD*

Instrumental math rock, how I always seem to rendezvous with you here on the pages of *Punk Planet*! I must admit to growing tired said genre quickly, but Talk To Plants knows how to keep things interesting. Songs like "Baptism Of Fire" are performed with such calculated intricacy

that they're confusing just to hear, never mind to sit down and play. The band's tendency to rely on the crescendo is tiresome, if understandable, and to the band's credit, the payoff is usually worth it. A diamond in the prog-rock rough. (MS)
Cosmonaut, www.cosmonautrecords.com

Tamora – *There's No Tomorrow Baby So How About Tonight?, CDEP*

Tamora is another band that incorporates hardcore and metal and screams. They have politically conscious lyrics and a song about animal rights. Even though the lyrics are stronger than the music, everything here lacks originality. (EH)
Happy Couples Never Last, PO Box 36997, Indianapolis, IN 46236, www.hcnl.com

Tanooki Suit – *Rough Lines, CD*

The indie rock game: Tristeza-like instrumentals, heartbroken lyrics and Pretty Girls Makes Graves guitar work. Your little brother/sister calls this heaven. I call it hell. (RL)
Tanooki Suit, 340 W. 11th St., Traverse City, MI 49684, www.tanookisuit.com

Tarantula Hawk – *S/T, CD*

This is too cheesy for me. Their drones and wispy attitude towards a "new prog era" isn't working. Prog-rock is King Crimson; Tarantula Hawk is boring. If people tell me that I "just don't get it," I'll club them to death with my copy of *The Inner Mounting Flame*. (DH)
Life Is Abuse, PO Box 20524, Oakland, CA 94620, www.lifeisabuse.com

Tarentel – *We Move Through Weather, CD*

As the title suggests, these post-rock instrumentals prod along at the pace of changes in the weather. Drums are methodical, guitars wail in the breeze, odd things clang in sway. Its ambience can slip into background, though fans of their previous work will find this another steady addition. (BA)
Temporary Residence Ltd., temporaryresidence.com

Target Cells / White Pigs / Chronic Disorder – *Hardcore From the Early Days: Three Way Split, 12"*

The LP is just what the title says: old hardcore reissued for all to hear. If you're a fan of these bands or interested in early '80s hardcore, pick this up. Me? I was three. (DH)
Coldswat, PO Box 352, Manly 2095, NSW Australia, www.coldswatrecords.com

Tartufi – *Westward Onward, CDEP*

Tartufi's punk tracks navigate a winding coastal highway from point A to point B. Riding a big guitar sound, the songs take twists and turns both subtle and sharp. The almost emo dynamics complement the swooping, Sleater-Kinney-style dual vocal lines belted by leaders Simone Grudzen and Lynne Angel. Pretty good. (JM)
Self-released, www.tartufirock.net

Ted Leo And The Pharmacists – *Shake The Sheets, CD*

Intensely political and filled with musical moments that will have you hopping out of your seat, *Shake The Sheets* is just as good as *Hearts Of Oak* and *The Tyranny Of Distance*. Ted Leo, who has become renowned for his ability to weave literate punk into powerful pop songs, writes more about the current political climate on this album, with songs about the war, guns, detainees and questionable authority figures. The lyrics are also more direct here, and the sound, reduced to only guitars and drums, is more stripped down, proving a subtle backdrop for Leo's vocals, which seem to be slightly affected by throat surgery he had last year. Leo doesn't hit the upper register quite as often, but the intensity and ferocity is all still there. "Me And Mia," "Shake The Sheets," "Little Dawn," and "Walking To Do" are up there with Leo's best songs, and if you've been wanting to hear a fleshed-out version of "Bleeding Powers," that's on here too. This album, brimming with anger,

hope and enthusiasm, offers a much-needed dose of optimism after those disappointing November returns. (LW)
Lookout!, 3264 Adeline St., Berkeley, CA 94703, www.lookoutrecords.com

Ten Volt Shock – *S/T, 12"*

This intense German noise outfit answers Elvis with "Be Cruel," a song that manages to be an avant garde onslaught of sound while also rocking a hook so catchy it almost hints at disco. It's a very strong record, and it comes in a screen-printed sleeve emblazoned with the namesake shock. (DAL)
X-Mist Records, Postfach 1545, 72195 Nagold, Germany, www.x-mist.de

Terror – *Life & Death, 7"*

Don't be fooled by the blue marble coloring; this piece of vinyl contains four of the more brutal hardcore cuts that I've heard in a while. Featuring Buried Alive's Scott Vogel on vocals, Terror cut through the bullshit permeating the hardcore scene and deliver a raw, unflinching slab of hardcore. (BN)
Reaper, PO Box 2935, Liverpool, NY 13089, www.reaperhardcore.com

Tetsuo – *Malmohrahknig, CDEP*

I am walking the wire on this one. The music is slower than how I like my grind and metal. The art makes the CD look like a cool video game. The intro is in a language I am unfamiliar with, but the band is from Pennsylvania. They have cool song titles like "What About Jon Lovitz," but the song has nothing to do with the actor. They have their good points and their bad points, but I don't know if I could say that I would listen to this again. It seems a bit forced and incoherent, very much like this review. Still, there was a lot of work put into this release, so they should at least get a thumbs up for effort. (TK)
Whorth, PO Box 129 Peckville, PA 18452, www.whorth.com

Texas Thieves – *Killer On Craigs List, CD*

Skate rock is back. The title track has a great guitar riff, and this fits perfectly on my mix tape between the Circle Jerks and Agent Orange. Throw on your old Vans, grab your Gator board, and find someone's pool to skate. (EA)
Dr. Strange Records, PO Box 1058, Alta Loma, CA 91701, www.drstrangerecords.com

Textbook Traitors – *Vinyl Collections Vol. 1, CD*

A collection of early Textbook Traitors songs that are not nearly as well written or recorded as their more recent full-length. Midwest screamo from Milwaukee pretty much sums it up. I would suggest hitting up their full-length. (TK)
Magic Bullet, 17 Argyle Hills Dr., Fredericksburg, VA 22405, www.magicbulletrecords.com

That I Guy – *Songs In The Key Of Beotch, CD*

File under "fun to see live, but annoying to hear." I worked a That I Guy show once, and it was very entertaining. He plays a homemade apparatus called "the magic pipe," which is constructed of PVC pipes and various gadgets, and he plays along with a drum machine. It's definitely a departure from the usual fare at an indie-rock club, so it's fun to see. But the stream-of-consciousness lyrics, despite their interesting vocal cadences, get old, as do the weird bleeps and bloopers (see the beginning of "Weasel Potpie"). The overall feel is that of Ween performing with the Blue Man Group. By the halfway point of this disc, chances are you'll be more than ready for it to end. But wait, the penultimate track is two minutes of pure noise (again with bleeps, vocal samples and nonsense). Then there's the nearly 10-minute closing track. That I Guy is asking a lot of listeners, and it was a testament to the triumph of the human spirit that I made it through this whole disc. If you have a chance to see That I Guy, definitely do it—just don't pick this CD up after the show. (KR)
Righteous Babe, PO Box 95, Elliott Station, Buffalo, NY 14205, www.righteousbabe.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Rex Reason (RR)

Blue Cheer, Vincebus Eruptum. The sound on this record is so thick it should have been pressed on butter. While Black Sabbath gets a lot of the credit for creating the heavy part of the metal equation, Blue Cheer deserves a certain amount too. While the attack wasn't quite as honed as Sabbath's—in part due to Blue Cheer's less burly musicianship—Blue Cheer's Hendrix/Cream-inspired heavy guitar skronk was just a beautiful expression of the raw noise the electric guitar is capable of. Plus, this has the best version of "Summertime Blues" anywhere. That the two best songs on this are covers ("Summertime Blues" and "Parchment Farm") says a lot about where the band's strength lay, as proven by their eventual downward slide into shitty '70s boogie rock. With too much contemporary heavy music lacking anything remotely close to swing, it's nice to be able to put something this swinging and bluesy on and still get your hair blown back by pure, thick volume.

Five Easy Pieces: Big Business, demo CD; Blow Up Blow, "Promise"/"Final Mistake" 7"; Banyan, *Live At Perkins' Palace*; Neko Case, *The Tigers Have Spoken*; Richard Buckner, *Dents And Shells*.

These Enzymes – Henry, CDEP

It's hard to believe but These Enzymes are a hardcore metal band featuring members of The All-American Rejects. The sound is heavy, crunchy, screaming, and dissonant, nothing like The All-American Rejects. (SJ)
Doghouse, PO Box 8946, Toledo, OH 43623, www.doghouserecords.com

Things In Herds – I Can Dancing And Walking, CD

Evidently the bedrooms of England are filled with the same acoustics, shaped with the same sad-walled plaster board and capable of capturing the delicate weeps and midtempo everyman baubles of any songwriter with an eight-track recorder. Things In Herds' 10 songs here are well-done, tracing paper-thin beauties with tiny little heartbeats. (SM)
Undecided, 7460 NW 127th Terr., Parkland, FL 33076, www.undecidedrecords.com

Think I Care – Mongrel, CDEP

After a few releases on Deadalive, TIC deliver eight tracks of anger and rage similar to bands of Boston's past (DYS, SSD) on a new label. My throat gets sore listening to these guys, but they keep it so agro that they make me want to floor punch. (DM)
Walk All Night, PO Box 149 Hunlock Creek, PA 18621, www.walkingallnight.com

Thirddimension – Permanent Holiday, CD

On their second album, these Swedes seem like blatant Anglophiles. The bouncy tracks conjure up The Kinks and early Britpop, especially Blur circa *Leisure*. Slower tracks ape Travis. The songs are OK, but they sound recycled and lack any sort of fresh input. (MP)
Hidden Agenda, 303 West Griggs Street, Urbana IL 61801, www.parasol.com

This Is Exploding – Until The Next Red Light, CD

This Is Exploding play melodic indie rock that is almost heavy enough at times for circle pits. There is definitely a car theme running through the songs, but these guys are more Sunny Day Real Estate than Gearhead Records. (SJ)
Self-released, www.thisisexploding.com

This Moment In Black History / Fatal Flying Guilloteens – split, CD

Two great tastes that taste great together. Both bands bring the spastic, slopped-out-yet-Devo-weird punk and rock, but both have their own method of trash-punk delivery. (RR)
GSL, PO Box 65091, Los Angeles, CA 90065, www.goldstandardlabs.com

This Providence – Our Worlds Divorce, CD

No, no, no. The press release claims that debut is "unique" and "something more than the cookie-cutter rock bands out today." Obviously the writer hasn't turned on MTV in the past several years. This sounds exactly like every other "emo" band out there. It's boring, and I say no. (MP)
RocketStar, PO Box 54108, Redondo, WA 98054-0108, www.rocketstar.com

This Robot Life – Becoming Work Revolutionaries, CD

My advice to This Robot Life: Pick a style, any style, and go with it. The open-

ing track on this Milwaukee-based group's album, an Against Me!-esque political, melodic hardcore song, is incredible, but this CD is so stylistically all over the map otherwise that it ends up sucking big time. (AE)
Self-released, 4110 North Woodburn St., Milwaukee, WI 53211, www.thisrobotlife.com

This Scares Me – S/T, 7"

This 7" gives you heavy, speedy, hardcore with rabid, scratchy, screaming without an infusion of metal. It lacks creativity, and the screaming is pretty unbearable. (EH)
Tsunami, 231 Emery Hills Road, Shapleigh, ME 04076, www.tsunamirecords.com

This Ship Will Sink – You Are Precisely My Cup Of Tea, CDEP

This Ship Will Sink serves up frantic, metallic hardcore with two screamers, blast beats, breakdowns and beefy guitar sounds. Nothing stands out as original or good. I can't help but to reflect on how apropos their band name is—need I say more? (EH)
Magic Bullet, 17 Argyle Hills Drive, Fredericksburg, VA 22405, www.magicbulletrecords.com

Those Poor Bastards – Country Bullshit, CDEP

A drug-addled two-piece plays darkly comic country ditties. Songs about pills and misogyny—interesting in a b-horror movie kinda way. (AJ)
Self-released, www.thosepoorbastards.com

Thousand Arrows, When I Go / When We Were Gone, 7"

Two sleepy little alt-county cuts that I would write off as unspectacular if it weren't for the inclusion of the lap steel on both tracks. For some reason, a little lap steel has the power to make mediocre alt-county worth listening to. (LW)
St. Ives / self-released, 1499 West 2nd St., Bloomington, IN, 47403.

A Thousand Falling Skies – The Wiltling, CD

This is some pretty relentless, hardcore-tinged metal. You've got your catchy thrash-metal parts, your intricate guitar parts, some glass-gargling vocals mixed with well-sung parts and a crushing rhythm section. Then there are the quieter intros and breakdowns that remind me of older In Flames. Not bad. (NS)
Stillborn, PO Box 3019, New Haven, CT 06515, www.stillbornrecords.com

Thunder In The Valley – S/T, CDEP

Those of us who enjoy hearing young people write tunes for Eastern European navalmen on leave in the early 1900s have yet another disc to Contra dance to. Those of us in the real world also might find this pseudo-klezmer group surprisingly tolerable thanks to its dextrous vocalist. (TS)
Self-released, PO Box 14114, Minneapolis, MN 55414, www.thunderinthevalleyband.com

Toilet Boys – The Early Years, CD

This group rides the "fact" that they were "one of Joey and Dee Dee Ramones favorite bands." This makes a whole lotta sense, seeing as The Ramones' Marshall stacks rendered their brains useless by 1980. More of

the same root note bass, terrace shouting, redundant bullshit. (RL)
OzIt Morpheus, PO Box 67082 Century City Station, Los Angeles CA, 90067, www.tractor-ozit.com

Total Verlost – S/T, 12"

These 10 songs may be in German, but no matter what the language, it's punk. The songs are really good with nice, noisy guitar solos and pounding drums. The record also includes a 20-page booklet. (DI)
Suburban Hardcore, www.suburban-hardcore.tk

Totally Radd!! – Shark Attack Day Camp, CD

This band loves Nintendo and synthesizers, so they make songs about video games with game-like sounds. It's kitschy and sounds like the future, circa 1981. But the novelty wears out by the second song, and listening becomes tedious. Even the "Runaway Train" cover, the best song, can't save this debut. (MP)
Retard Disco, PO Box 46163, Los Angeles, CA 90046, www.retarddisco.com

Trouble Everyday – Days Vs. Nights, CD

Awesome, rhythmic r'n'r with a postpunk feel, Trouble Everyday easily avoid the post-postpunk bandwagon, as their intentions are truly original and different. Smart songwriting and a blend of sounds (taking cues from everything from Joy Division to Q & Not U and Fugazi) form a concise record, which I recommend. (MG)
Turnstile, www.turnstilelabel.com

True If Destroyed – S/T, CD

This band is awesome—definitely one of the best albums in my review pile here, and I'm having an unfortunate dilemma about this album because I know that nothing I can say about it will do it justice. It's just one of those "can't really describe" sort of things, so I'm going to try and make them sound as awesome as they are, short and sweet: There's a whole lotta '90s "emcore" and '90s Dischord influence goin' on. Add a quirky, off-kilter pop sound, a bit of Discount-like vocal sensibility, and this is what you get, but better...aw fuck, just go buy it! (MG)
Ed Walters, 11 S. 43rd St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-2901, www.edwaltersrecords.org;
Franklin, www.franklin-records.com

Tsunami Bomb – The Definitive Act, CD

Raucous yet melodic, Tsunami Bomb's latest effort manages to straddle the fine line between poppy and rough, without losing any of its urgency. Agent M once again provides strong female vocals to lead the songs home over the potent bass guitar and drum combo and the whirling guitar. The intense melodies complement Agent M's vocals and tie the sound together while keeping the punk abrasiveness. Agent M joins the ranks of lead vocalists from such great bands as Squat, the Groodies and Fabulous Disaster that should help establish Tsunami Bomb as one of the more compelling female-led bands out there. (BN)
Kung Fu, PO Box 38009, Hollywood, CA 90038, www.kungfurecords.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Neal Shah (NS)

Snuff, Snuff Said. Snuff is the band that started my love of melodic English punk and almost cost me a friendship. You see, I got the original version of this album on cassette a long time ago, and then got my friend Jason into them. Soon after, we each embarked on a quest to find a CD copy of it, back before it was rereleased on Fat. Well, we ended up at this record store, and guess who finds a copy of the CD? Jason. Does he give it to me for introducing him to such an awesome band? No. What a dick. But anyway, he was smart to keep it. After *Machine Gun Etiquette* and *City Baby Attacked By Rats*, this is probably the finest slab of English punk. The melodies on this album are so thick and catchy, and it totally blew away most of the American pop punk I was into at the time. Songs like "Words Of Wisdom," "Too Late," and "Not Listening" are incredibly anthemic and fun. It's amazing that the melodies came from only three people. Duncan, the drummer, has a great ear for pop music; he just hears it a little faster. The covers on this album, "I Think We're Alone Now" and "Purple Haze," probably paved the way for the flood of pop-punk covers, but for some reason Snuff's covers were always goofy and good, and they still are. What's even more amazing about this CD is that it was just the start in a great musical career that's still going.

My roommates are both kicking back with a Sparks: Senator Flux, *The Criminal Special*; Swiz, *Demo*; HDQ, *Sinking*; Weston, *A Real Life Story Of Teenage Rebellion*; COC, everything with Mike Dean singing; Accused, *Hymns Of The Deranged*; Jimmy Eat World, *Futures*.

Reviewer Spotlight: Matthew Siblo (MS)

V/A, Survival Of The Fattest. I always feel obliged to dig out some embarrassing record of my youth and display it my spotlight. A few weeks ago, I found this long forgotten compilation in my roommate's car, which gave our ride to Philadelphia a much-needed dose of double-bass drum. Starting with the Hi-Standard's campy cover of "California Dreaming," *Survival Of The Fattest* was a burgeoning mall punk's dream, not just for its quality but also for its ludicrously low price. Four measly dollars gave you unreleased NOFX and Lagwagon songs, not to mention Diesel Boy's goofball anthem "Titty Twister" and Frenzel Rhomb's crowning achievement in mediocrity, "Run." For its time and place, *Survival Of The Fattest* had its fair share of heavyweights. Propagandhi's militant "Nation States" and Good Riddance's "Mother Superior" catered to your socially conscious Inco jean-wearer, while Strung Out and No Use For A Name were busy perfecting the budding "Fat" sound. So how could anyone exalt a compilation that highlights one of the most homogenous movements in punk-rock history? My bias lies in this comp's crucial accompaniment on long car trips and backyard BBQs, when a punk cover a John Denver song sounded like a novel idea. Sure, we've all moved on, but every once in awhile I like to revisit records like this as a reminder that I should never take myself too seriously. So drop the pose, lose your cool and, when no one's looking, let yourself get Fat one more time.

Holla atcha boy: Man Man, *S/T*; Elliott Smith, *From A Basement On The Hill*; The Blood Brothers, *Crimes*; Joanna Newsom, *Milk Eyed Mender*; The Replacements, *Live At The Roxy*.

**Tub Ring – Zoo Hypothesis, CD**

I can only describe this as an “independent rock opera.” Tub Ring uses so many instruments and so many musical styles that it can’t be categorized. The singing goes from dean and poppy to dirty and screamy quite frequently—think choir to Coalesce. This baffling record is a truly a schizophrenic epic. (EH)
Underground Inc., PO Box 16008, Chicago, IL 60616, www.undergroundinc.com

.22 – The Patriots, CD

The three-piece harkens back to the early days of ‘90s indie rock, when lo-fi recordings stopped just short of a killer riff, and angular melodies beautifully fed into hooky choruses. Chicago’s .22 does this sort of thing quite well, with short, punchy songs that eagerly splice together a number of half-developed melodies. (TM)
Roydale, www.roydale.com

22–Pistepirkko – The Nature Of 22–Pistepirkko, 2xCD

So weird, harmless and lo-fi that it’s pleasantly charming. This trio from Northern Finland blends such an incredibly bizarre mixture of elements—‘60s garage rock, moody blues and melancholic country & western—that this collection of later work doesn’t necessarily come together as an album. It does, however, work as an example of how influences are filtered and distorted when separated from their country of origin. Ever wonder what country music would sound like if it were played by someone who grew up in a tiny village by the Arctic Circle? How about Kinks-era garage rock? Then you might want to check this out. Admittedly, the earlier stuff in this double-disc collection fairs better, when they were still (apparently) influenced by early Stooges stuff. These earlier songs are full of buzzing guitars, catchy lyrics and the occasional dance beat. Later stuff is mostly synth-driven, but lacking a much-needed sassy bass line. All in all, interesting enough to make me want to check out their earlier stuff. (TG)

Bare Bone Business, Fikenwerder Süderdelch 22, 21129 Hamburg, Germany, www.bbbsland.de

Twinkie – S/T, CD

File this under “bands sure to receive a cease-and-desist order in the near future.” That’s easier than categorizing them on the basis of their sound. It’s noise rock with an experimental sound and plenty of starts and stops, but clearer hooks than comparable music and nice male-female dual vocals. (DAL)
Avebury, 22287 Mulholland Hwy., Suite 98, Calabasas, CA 91302, www.aveburyrecords.com

Two Lone Swordsmen – Big Silver Shining Motor Of Sin, CDEP

This stuff reeks of leather, latex, and drippy needles. These two so-so new tracks and a remix of a previously released Gun Club cover come off as low-rent Jesus And Mary Chain, with only the floppy bass on “Feast” providing sustenance. Not much electro, not much rock. But not much of anything else. (TS)
Warp, 210–228 West St., Sheffield, U.K., S1 4EU, www.warprecords.com

Ulysses.010 – S/T, CD

Led by Elephant 6 producer, musician, and player Robert Schneider, Ulysses.010 really know where to put it when it comes to writing charming, poppy indie rock. Their slightly breaking harmonies, guitar fuzz, and Schneider’s little-boy-whine singing style come together to bend the songs’ familiar, lively structures into something a bit more unusual. “Change” is one of the best songs I’ve heard all year (a single!), prompting horribly off-key sing-alongs upon only a second listen. From start to finish, this is a good album with catchy, kinetic harmonies and solid songwriting done with just enough flash, keeping the pieces in their places and avoiding the pitfalls of either spectacle or tediousness. (AJA)
Eenie Meenie, PO Box 691397, Los Angeles, CA 90069, www.eeniemeenie.com

Reviewer Spotlight: Tony Stasiek (TS)

Amps For Christ, Electrosphere. Before I knew an actual hippie, I assumed they were fairly creative folks. From what I’d seen on TV and in my dad’s *National Geographic* magazines, they appeared to live ideally reductionist lifestyles: crafting eyeglasses out of discarded KFC bones, raising hippie children in countryside yurts, etc. And a few in Claremont, Calif., formed this band either to mock my Sunday School teachers or replicate the sounds of all their appliances dumped in a vat of holy water. This Shrimper Records double CD is their magnum opus, as it features a full 95 minutes of Amps For Christ’s home-built, not-quite-traditional instruments turned to the sky in celebration of their ancient means of sound-making in hope of rousing some unknown deity. At its root, it’s mystic folk music, amplified beyond belief and recognition as it to criticize the *Anthology Of American Folk Music* for the noise-core sect. Fuzzed-out ragas and psychedelic bagpipes litter the *Electrosphere*, and they often run out of the gate screaming in voices humans have not learned to articulate. I could hum along, but I’d sound like a vacuum cleaner. The hidden treasures occur when Amps For Christ turns down the volume on its archaic Eastern influenced ballads, which come complete with intricate guitar-plucking and melodies so sweet and adorning they could make Nick Drake smile. I regret that real-life hippies turned out to be such a pain, but at least they find this CD irritating.

(Insert witty “I’m listening to” quip here): Racetrack, *City Lights*; Elliott Smith, *From A Basement On A Hill*; Trumans Water, *Singles 1992–1997*; The Turn-ons, *East*; V/A, *Damage, Destruction, Terror, and Mayhem*.

Underclaire – Small Town X, CD

Underclaire’s music is familiar, sounding aged a decade in its bending of tunelessness and noise. Although difficult to label, Underclaire’s changing rhythms, the dissonance and flow of their melodies, and the low-key intensity of the vocals are well done throughout. (AJA)
Erika Records / self-released, www.underclaire.com

Underminded – Hail Unamerican!, CD

Wow, Kung Fu has jumped on the metallic hardcore bandwagon. Too fashionable and too slickly produced for my taste, this was recorded by a guy who also did Velvet Revolver. That’s the most positive thing I can say about this. (DA)

Kung Fu, PO Box 38009, Hollywood, CA 90038, www.kungfurecords.com

Unpersons – IV: Self Portrait, CDEP

A brutal, doom-influenced 15-minute track adorns this CD—and it’s a doozy. Lots of twists and turns musically, with a great breakdown toward the end. Parts remind me of everyone from Botch to European hardcore bands, but with modern influence. I’ll be keeping tabs on these guys. (KM)
Life is Abuse, PO Box 20524, Oakland, CA 94620, www.lifeisabuse.com

Until The End – The Blind Leading The Lost, CD

Great lyrics, great explanations, cool artwork, generic music. At least when they are playing the angry “tough guy” breakdowns, they can have something intelligent to sing about. I guess this is better than the other Hatebreed knockoff bands, but only due to their message. (TK)
Eulogy, www.eulogyrecordings.com

Upsilon Acrux – Volucris Avis Dirae–Arum, CD

Well I guess prog is back in all its pretentious glory. This CD was like a video-game experience gone horribly awry. OK guys, we get it, you’re accomplished musicians, but I have a headache now from counting in five time signatures at once. (SJ)
Planaria, PO Box 21340, Washington DC 20009, www.planariainc.com

Used Alien Mind – Positive Mental Theme, CD

The music of this one man band is so schizophrenic it’s hard not to wonder if it’s a cry for help. Either way, the multiple music styles—garagey rock, psychedelic dreamy pop, modern folk and boogie woogie—are executed by one talented nutcase. (RR)
Self-released, usedalienmind@msn.com

Useless Intent – Destined for Failure, CD

Another throwback to ‘80s, Useless Intent plays typical, though proficient punk/hardcore with good vocals. Get this if you need more two-minute blasts of fun-loving punk. It includes doctored photos of the Capitol and the Statue of Liberty. Reminds me of my Reagan-era youth. (EA)
Adlab Records/self-released, PO Box 5118, Orange, CA 92663

Vain Adorations – The War Is Over, CD

In a teenage world where so-called “sensitivity” begets violence, Vain Adorations’ formulaic, modern-day emo is almost too much to bear. OK, it is too much to bear, with its muddy production, contrived song structures, painstaking vocals and pseudo-aggressive, melodramatic lyrics. Someone, make it stop. (AJA)

Self-released, 2690 Hacienda Drive, Duarte, CA 91010, www.vainadorations.com

Vanishing, The – Still Lives Are Failing, CD

As if they’d crawled up from beneath a murky industrial underbelly, The Vanishing are a striking example of everything that can be right with

rhythmic, danceable punk rock. Jesse Eva’s striking pipes are reminiscent of Karen O’s sexy scowl, but the easily drawn comparisons end there. Between the straight-up boogie of “Still Lives” to the saxophone induced stomp of “Cuckoo Spit,” The Vanishing are one of the few acts still breathing life into what I had once believed to be a dead scene. Three cheers for the post-punk re-revival. (MS)

GSL, PO Box 65091, Los Angeles, CA 90065, www.goldstandardlabs.com

Vaux – Plague Music, CDEP

I remember the last time I heard Vaux, they were on Volcom. Then they were a pretty intense rock band, kind of Bronx-ish in some ways. Now they’re more progressive. They kept some of the aggression, but opened up to being a bit femme and glam rock mixed with some serious punk rock. Heavy as hell guitars and a pounding rhythm section are equally balanced by quieter bits and lighter rock parts. On first listen, I was a bit taken back by the amount of change, considering where they were coming from. But giving it another chance, I found this is an incredible record, and five songs definitely aren’t enough. However, I don’t think it will be long until these guys will be pushed as the next big thing. I hear Atlantic is pushing this release while EVR is putting out the record. I think this is incredible, but it may be a bit too odd for the majors. But Bungle, Tool and System Of A Down have all had success on majors. Congrats and good luck, Vaux. You’ll need it if you go to a major. (DM)
Equal Vision, PO Box 38202 Albany, NY 12203-8202, www.equalvision.com

Vicious Five, The – The Electric Chants Of The Disenchanted, CD

The Vicious Five play fast, screaming metallic hardcore. I’ve heard so many bands like this lately that it’s hard to find anything unique about this band. It falls squarely in the middle in terms of quality. (JJG)
Self-released, www.thevicious5.com

Victory At Sea – Memories Fade, CD

Bringing odyssey to indie, Victory At Sea’s shifting surges of violin, piano and intense, low-register female vocals establish them as a band of talent and dynamics, capable of writing impressive modern epics. Brooding and eloquently temperamental, in their finer moments the Boston quartet is able to lure listeners into their piercingly exposed world. However, *Memories Fade* has its lackluster sections. Singer Mona Elliot’s bellows intermittently come off as overdramatic, and as the album progresses, the songwriting seems to diminish. That said, for the most part Victory At Sea’s newest full-length is a good’un; the slight flaws come off as natural, providing a sense of gravity amongst an experience that often feels overwhelmingly surreal. (BM)
Gern Blandsten, PO Box 356 River Edge, NJ 07661, www.gernblandsten.com

Voodoo Glow Skulls – Adiccion, Tradicion Y Revolucion, CD

VGS has been playing ska, punk, and Latin-influenced songs since the early ‘90s. This new record has the band featuring a re-enforced horn section and new-found energy, resulting in some of their edgiest and traditional ska-punk yet. “Mayhem And Murder” could well be the band’s best cut to date. (BN)
Victory, 346 N Justice St. Suite 504, Chicago, IL 60607, www.victoryrecords.com

Waylons, The – S/T, CDEP

Although this EP has some weaker tracks, the great songs are packed with enough pop goodness to leave me wanting more. The stand-out and first track, “To Me,” is a jaunty, upbeat piece with creative lyrics, driving rhythm and jangly guitars. Other great songs are “Stunning” and “Whisky,” a twangy woman-done-me-wrong track. (LW)
Self-released, www.waylons.com

Warriors, The – War Is Hell, CD

This album had some good things going for it. Namely, great sing-alongs, solid production and big, bouncy Sick Of It All grooves in the majority of the songs. Not really my bag though. (TG)
Eulogy, PO Box 24913, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33307, www.eulogyrecords.com

Wasteland – October, CD

Not a bad collection of midtempo dance songs with massively distorted bass. The beats are kind of sexy and ready for a dance floor grind. The overall sound is a good mix of '80s style and modern sampling techniques. (DI)
Transparent / self-released, www.isoundinfo.com

Wavering Saints – Strike Date EP, 12"

Computerized indie-pop with reversed drum loops and heavily distorted acoustic guitars accounting for the melody. Subdued vocals and messy breakdowns round out the record. It's OK, nothing great. More suited for coffee shop background music than live venue. (BN)
Central District, PO Box 776, Stockton, CA 95201, www.centraldistrictrecords.com

Wednesdays, The – S/T, 7"

Good ol' rock 'n' roll, all sweet and syrupy with a nice punk backbone. Fans of the Dictators, Stooges, and Big Boys alike will all dig. Also, a nice country-punk version of "Will The Circle Be Unbroken" caps off the single. (MG)
Perpetrator, PO Box 68-984, Newton, Auckland, New Zealand, perpetrator_1@hotmail.com

Welcome The Plague Year – S/T, CD

WTPY is true to its hardcore roots: heavy, midtempo, beat-driven hardcore doesn't sound metal. The song structures are intricate, and the musicianship is solid. The songs are lengthy, but keep the listener's attention. Hardcore fans should check this out. (EH)
Turnstile, www.turnstilelabel.com

Wimpy Dicks – Three Shades Of Patriotism, CD

This old-school hardcore band (since 1980) has a generic sound and lyrics about the current political/social climate in the US. There are some good lyrics ("American flag made in China / that makes you a patriot, man"), but it doesn't make up for the lackluster music. (JJG)
Self-released, PO Box 14016 San Luis Obispo, CA 93406, wimpydicks@hotmail.com

Windmill – Every Last Windmill Shall Fall, CD

A high-brow take on lo-fi, Windmill is essentially one man with a gang of helpers. Kent Randell allows dogs to bark on one song and on another sings, "I know I'm quixotic and dumb / I just think it's the greatest virtue left." The songs please him individually and the rest of us intrinsically. (SM)
Big Spoon, PO Box 15066, Boston, MA 02215, www.kentsgenealogy.com/bigspoon

Wire – On The Box 1979, CD

What an incredible must-own disc of the year. Not only do you get the best-sounding live Wire disc, but it also comes with the second and third LPs. So you get Wire at one of their best times. Wait, there's more! You get a DVD of the show that is equally brilliant. With 20 tracks and a 20-minute interview, this a full set. Casual fans will be shocked at how great Wire sound, and their confidence is astounding. The show takes place on German television, and the audience is a sampling of German youth. They don't look excited and form a great juxtaposition to the explosion on stage. When Wire ends a frantic song on a powerful downbeat, you expect the crowd to explode, but they just give the casual clap. Wire may have had a period where even their best fans looked away, but this isn't that time. Released on their own label, it will make you feel even better that they're getting the money. I generally do not keep live shows on VHS/DVD, but this will stay in my collection with my BBC Buzzcocks, Clash, and Sex Pistols documentaries. Unlike their

contemporaries, this is the only quality live Wire performance you will own from their heyday. (EA)
Pink Flag, www.pinkflag.com

Wives, The – Erect The Youth Problem, CD

Blasts of distorted noise barraged me until I didn't think I could stand it anymore, then there was a pause or a more gentle passage. The lyrics are all shouted, and the music is messy. If you like The Locust, you'll probably like this too. (JJG)
Cold Sweat, www.coldsweat.org

Wolf And Cub / Fuiguinet – spilt, 7"

These two complement as well as whipped cream and baby-back ribs. Fuiguinet algebraically jerks through a sophisticated number with a post-punk shine that makes a System Of A Down face and ends with a bizarre sci-fi scene. Wolf And Cub race and scream through an Alien Ant Farm take on gallows logic. (SM)
CurtainCall Music, www.ccmilabel.com

Wolfmother – S/T, CDEP

A retro trip doesn't have to be a bad thing (like punks need to be told that). This Australian trio is on a big retro trip for the late '60s and early '70s, specifically Hendrix, Zep and Sabbath with a little Kyuss thrown in. It works best when they're not completely Zep-ing out. (RR)
Modular, PO Box 1666, Darlinghurst, NSW 1300, Australia, www.modularpeople.com

Wovenhand – Consider The Birds, CD

Combine pieces of Blackheart Procession with singer/songwriter stuff like Tom Waits, and you're almost there. There are other influences that I can't put my finger on, but overall it's really dark and mellow. Not bad, but not my thing. (DA)
Sounds Familyre, PO Box 225, Clarksboro, NJ 08020, www.soundsfamilyre.com

WoWz, The – Long Grain Rights, CD

Either good music is timeless, or these guys have figured out how to create Beatles-esque and Dylan-ish music without sounding like a tired nostalgia trip. They don't strictly sound like those artists, but with songs built on strong harmony and a stripped down musical approach, those are the two most obvious comparisons. (RR)
Recommended If You Like, c/o Chris Maher, 400 W. 43rd St., #23-D, New York, NY, 10036, www.riylrecords.com

WPP, The – He Has The Technology, CD

The WPP are heavy, innovative, screamy, creative and overall unpredictable. They give you frantic and spastic, off-time rock with math-rock elements accompanied by three singer/screamers. This CD is original and worth a listen. (EH)
Satellite City, PO Box 3478, Hollywood, CA, 90078 www.satellite-city.org

Wrangler Brutes – Zulu, CD

Thank your lucky stars for Wrangler Brutes. Considering the band's list of prior engagements (Born Against, Men's Recovery Project and Skull Kontrol to name a few), it should come as no surprise that this particular endeavor falls nothing short of greatness. That is, of course, if you, as I do, find solace and inspiration in no-holds-barred, reckless punk rock. Perhaps it's the fact that this record reaffirms my belief that music can be splitting with unrestrained energy and outright danger. Perhaps it's the fact that Sam McPheeters' theatrical and convulsive rants are simultaneously vicious and hilarious. Perhaps it's the fact that in these dark times it's refreshing to hear a band that genuinely has no regard for any sort of candy coating. Or, perhaps it's the fact that spastic, class-five mu-

sical hurricanes really get my motor running. Chances are all of the for mentioned factors play into my thinking that this record and band are a saving grace—or a doomsday device, depending on how you look at it. Highly advised for fans of general radness. (BM)
Kill Rock Stars, 120 NE State Ave. PMB 418, Olympia, WA 98501, www.killrockstars.com

Yellow Press, The – Dead Man's Shoes 7"

Run of the mill, almost generic-sounding post-punk keyboard stuff mixed with a math rockness. The musicianship is tight, but the sound is getting lost in the middle of other bands with similar sounds. (AA)
www.christophersrecords.com

Yellow Press – S/T, 12"

Ex-members of Ebullition Records' faves Torches To Rome rock out all experimental art-punk style. A quirky pop element rounds out a sound similar to Wire, but you can still hear a nice hardcore influence, and the combination is very pleasing. (MG)

X-Mist, PO Box 1545, 72195 Nagold, Germany, www.x-mist.de; Christopher's, www.christophersrecords.com

You're Next – Pushing Forward, 7"

As this was playing, a friend walked into the room and said, "Cool, this sounds like Dag Nasty," only to follow it shortly after with "Oh wait it sucks." What changed his mind? The vocals and chugga-chugga part came into play. I can see how the mistake was made, but at least you don't have to repeat it. Although I like to support vinyl, I just can't do anything with this because it offers nothing new. (EA)
High Fidelity Records, PO Box 1071 Grover Beach, CA 93483, www.highfidelityrecords.com

Your Code Name Is: Milo – All Roads To Fault, CDEP

Having recorded five out of the seven tracks on their latest EP with Steve Albini, Your Code Name Is: Milo's noticeable Shellac influence isn't exactly shocking. It's also apparent in the inferior, sonically and structurally, tracks not recorded at Albini's Electrical Audio studios that the recording master's production mark greatly lends itself to the band, perhaps making songs seem tougher than they are. It's not that these gentlemen don't have their times of validity; the UK-based quintet does the loud/quiet thing impressively, and in certain instances their head-turning script flips hint at potential greatness. My doubts are founded in the band's lack of consistency; the EP packs some punch, but it also has a couple of watered-down, commercial whiners. I'm curious to see the direction of their upcoming full-length and whether or not they can pull off any of the colossus Albini sounds in a live environment. (BM)
Fiction, www.fictionrecords.co.uk

Yowie – Cryptoology, CD

Yowie play highly sophisticated noisecore that has no part repeating for longer than one second, which it means it takes a lot of work to write a five-minute song. The guitars sound like rubber bands being stretched to the rhythm of some mathematical formula. (SJ)

Skin Graft, PO Box 257546, Chicago, IL 60625, www.skingraftrecords.com

Zinn, Howard – Class And War In US Society: A Critique, CD

Howard Zinn, the author of the notable *A People's History of the United States*, discusses class contradictions in US history and provides an analysis of the current Iraq War in light of previous ones. He connects the two by discussing who benefits from war. The plus in hearing his talk is that the discussion is enlivened by his own personal experiences. After high school he worked in the shipyards for a few years, where he developed his class consciousness. When he did go to college, he studied history because he "wanted to change the

Reviewer Spotlight: Lisa Weingarth (LW)

Calexico, The Black Light. Joey Burns and John Convertino, the duo behind the Calexico collective, make precisely the type of music you'd expect from a band named after a bordertown tucked deep in the Baja desert: music that invokes images of sun-bleached cattle skulls, rolling tumbleweed, and endless plains of sand and sky. The band draws from a bevy of influences, most from the other side of the border, and fuses them into an accessible sound. In 1998, the band's second full-length, *The Black Light*, was released, thrusting Calexico into the indie spotlight. *The Black Light* has a cinematic quality and could easily be fooled for the soundtrack to a spaghetti western. The lazy tempo hardly moves beyond a crawl throughout the album's 17 tracks. The music is strikingly textured, built upon an impressive assortment of instruments, including lusty mariachi trumpets, upright bass, loopy synth samples, pedal steel, Spanish guitar and carnival organ. *The Black Light* is mostly instrumental, unlike the band's more current work, allowing for unadulterated appreciation of the musical backbone of these talented and versatile musicians.

Five of my favorites of 2004: The Arcade Fire, *Funeral*; Joanna Newsom, *The Milk Eyd Mender*; Felix Da Housecat, *Devin Dazzle & The Neon Fever*; Rilo Kiley, *More Adventurous*; Ted Leo And The Pharmacists, *Shake The Sheets* (reviewed this issue).



world." He emphasizes the importance of knowing history for understanding the present, even changing it. America has a myth that anyone who works hard will be successful, but as he remarks "I knew this was not true. I knew how hard my father had worked; I knew how hard my mother had worked, and, no, they didn't make it in the normal sense of what success is." As a CD, the lecture is recorded as one track, and it should be broken up into sections for better accessibility. Still, the recording makes for a fine introduction to his work or a nice, personalized summary review. (BA)

Maxxe Societal Press, www.maxxesociety.com

Zolof The Rock & Roll Destroyer – The Popsicle EP, CDEP

I'm typically not so enraptured by saccharine-sweet tunes, but Zolof play such irresistibly adorable pop music that they're impossible not to love. Bleeping keyboard melodies sweep around fantastic female vox, and a little hard-edged guitar tweaking brings out a delicate punk feel. Think Weezer, Rentals, early Anniversary, etc. Very recommended. (MG)

EyeBall, PO Box 179, Kearny, NJ 07032, www.eyeballrecords.com

V/A – A Houseguest's Wish: Translations Of Wire's "Outdoor Miner," CD

Nineteen tracks of interpretations of Wire's "Outdoor Miner" can be a little much to handle. A lot of the bands/songwriters take a needle-in-the-arm approach and struggle with redeveloping the chorus. However, some successfully change it up: Fiel Garvie do an instrumental version, Sharron Kraus turns it into a folk song, and the Jesus And Mary Chain-inspired take by Flying Saucer Attack is a standout. (AJA)

Words On Music, 715 University Ave., Suite 201, Minneapolis, MN 55414, www.words-on-music.com

V/A – Bottle Of Smoke: Toronto Rock & Roll Compilation, CD

This way above average compilation showcases a number of bands from Toronto. Highlights include The Fallout, The Class Assassins, Cheerleader 666, and Dayglo Abortions. There's something for everyone here, with many subgenres represented, and it made me wonder what other overlooked Canadian bands might be lurking out there. (AE)

Rubber Factory Records, 551 Concord Av. #2, Toronto, M6H 2R2, Canada

V/A – But Then Again, CD

A collection of unreleased tracks from the artists of the -scape label based in Berlin. It runs the gamut from dub and hip hop to house and jazz all with the backbone of electronica. Standout tracks come from Jan Jelinek, EPO, and Triosk. A good sampler for the variety on -scape. (BA)

-scape, Dunckestr. 7, 10437 Berlin, Germany, www.scape-music.de

V/A – Damage, Destruction, Terror, and Mayhem, CD

There's so much stuff on here (punk, garage, etc.), but all the stand-out tracks are from the metal bands (Wizards Of War, Final Hour). With crucial song titles like "Tears Of The Ice Witch," you really can't go wrong. A couple of good ones amid a whole lotta throw-aways. (KM)

New Regard Media, PO Box 5706 Bellingham, WA 98227, www.newregardmedia.com

♫ V/A – Demons And Rare Meat, CD

Chicago's new Mission Label was formed with the goal of offering a diverse and progressive platform for ground-breaking artists. On this comp, the label's first release, I'd say they've done it. Each of the 12 tracks is a genre-bending, creative nugget. "Socks," the contribution from Tunde Adebimpe of TV On The Radio, is a roughly hewn acapella tune layered over a beat-boxing rhythm and incorporating the chorus from "Brand New Key." Another high-profile addition is a rollicking, power-pop ballad by the first official side project of The Polyphonic Spree, 25% Toby. But, you knew those songs would be good, right? The songs by breakout bands included are good enough to stand up with the big boys of experimental indie music. Like Via Audio's "Developing Active People," a lush slice of electronic pop with sweet male/female harmonies accented by gentle keyboards. And The Watcher's "Looking For Homes" is a spastic, ass-shaking number reminiscent of the Talking Heads. Post-punkers Bring Back The Guns' track, "Art Of Malnutrition," is also worth a mention—a rhythmic, technically immaculate piece that makes the heart beat a little faster. This is one comp that you should check out. And, really, with the \$4.99 price tag, you have no reason not to. (LW)

Mission Label, 120 N. Green St., Ste. 703, Chicago, IL 60607, www.missionlabel.com

♫ V/A – It's A Trap Reader's Companion Vol. 1, CD

This is a companion CD to the Scandinavian webzine *It's A Trap*. First off, let me admit to having little to no knowledge of the present-day Scandinavian music scene (aside from, shudder, The Hives or [International] Noise Conspiracy.) And the cover art here was certainly suggesting a black metal redux from the land of ice and snow. But lo, this comp turned out to be a damn fine reminder that we aren't the only country listening to and making pretty music. These are all interesting local bands, albeit playing in a whole 'nother neck of the woods. Not everything on this incredibly varied comp necessarily works, but the first half of the album is quite good. I enjoyed the quieter, folksy stuff best, particularly the Lionheart Brothers and Jose Gonzalez (Sweden's answer to Iron & Wine), but there are some curiously infectious power-pop gems here as well. Definitely worth a listen. (TG)

It's A Trap, 926 Masonic Ave., Albany, CA 94706-2128, www.itsatrap.com

V/A – Mass Destruction, CD

NYC's Bankshot Records has done it again with this terrific compilation encompassing many of the genres and subgenres in the ever prolific punk scene. Twenty-six tracks, some new some old, including standouts from Choking Victim, Osker, Sixgun Radio, Leftover Crack, The Lawrence Arms, and Morning Glory. Well worth the cash. (BN)

Bankshot, www.bankshotrecords.com

V/A – Mohawks And Whiskey Shots, CD

Boring compilation featuring bands from Norway, the UK and the U.S. playing various styles of mediocre and instantly forgettable punk. A lot of the 27 tracks were flat-out painful. The tired riffs and cliché lyrics displayed on this release were as corny as an episode of *Full House*. (KM)

Hussieskunk, PO Box 1599, Reynoldsburg, Ohio 43068, www.hussieskunk.com

V/A – Music For Playgrounds Volume One, CD

This new record label based in Brampton, Ontario, bursts onto the scene with this tight and bright comp packed with 20 solid emo-pop tunes. Braid is the best known band on the record, which also features strong contributions from Wheels On The Bus, Moneen and Ten Speed Hero.

Sunday League Records, 16 Sawston Circle, Brampton, Ontario, L7A 2N7, Canada, www.sundayleagueurecords.com

V/A – Newest Industry A Compilation: 2002-2004, CD

Samplers are typically lame, but this one is worth checking out as it's from a solid label. It has 26 cool previously released tracks by popular aggressive, melodic bands such as Four Letter Word, Fifth Hour Hero, and I Excuse as well as a previously unreleased track by No Choice. (AE)

Newest Industry, Unit 100, 61 Wellfield Road, Cardiff, CF24 3DG, UK, www.thenewestindustry.com

V/A – Off Target, CD

This is a compilation of bands from The Netherlands, most of them artsy post-hardcore. Overall, the quality of songs is good, but too many of the songs sound like they were made on the same template. (JJG)

Coalition, Newtonstraat 212, 2562 KW Den Haag, The Netherlands, www.coalition-records.com

♫ V/A – Ohio 2, CD

Brought to you by Foot In Mouth Productions, this kickass comp features 15 punk bands from Ohio playing two songs each. Who knew Ohio had so many good bands? There is a whole treasure trove of good bands on here, including the punk rawk attitude of Eric Wrong & The Do-Rights and the psychobilly romp of Lords Of The Highway. It also features great songs by the Strange Division, Stab-O-Matic, the Wankers, and the Jeffs. The "Best Song on the Comp" Award goes to "Bring Me The Head Of Radiohead" by The Professional Againsts with its opening line, "Underground music has become so fucking lame." (SJ)

Foot In Mouth, 610 Philip Ave., Akron, OH 44305, www.geocities.com/fimpakron

V/A – Pain In The Big Neck, CD

This underground garage rock compilation features bands from around the country, including the Functional Blackouts, Sweet JAP, and Sagger. I mean, if you like it young, loud, and snotty, and wanna be able to name-check all the hip stuff, then you'll love this. It all seems to blur together to me. (AJ)

Big Neck, PO Box 8144, Reston, VA 20195, www.bigneckrecords.com

V/A – Punk's Dead And It's Your Fault, CD

This comp is the modern version of those old BCT cassettes. There are over 30 bands of all styles of hardcore on here. The Netherlands are well represented, with quite a few amazing bands on here. Why not introduce yourself to a mass group of new bands? (DA)

Sick Of Talk, PO Box 9723, Reno, NV 89507, www.sickoftalk.com

V/A – Ratas De Ciudad, CD

This collection is an homage and documentation of the Mexican American Southkore scene in South Chicago from 2000-2002. Many taking influence from Los Crudos, the bands here include Eske, PKDores, Reaccion, NFN, and Los Jodidos. (DM)

Southkore, 2814 S. Spaulding Ave., Chicago, IL 60623

V/A – Rebellion Records Presents Brabantia Nostra, CD

Like the subtitle says, this is a compilation of Dutch oi and street punk. All the songs sounded like the same band, and I there isn't any new territory being explored here, so it was a pretty boring listen. Gang vocals, songs about skinheads and fucking shit up...you know. (KM)

Rebellion Records Holland, Engstoeep 57, 5246 BD Rosmalen, The Netherlands, www.rebellionrecords.nl

V/A – Rock 'n' Rolia Outta Control, CD

This compilation was released to tie into a garage-rock tour of the same name that took Holland by storm last year featuring Wiseguy, 69 Charger, Stiletto, Black Rodeo, and The Lulabelles. The tour must've been a blast. Why are all the best garage rock bands from Europe and Asia? (AE)

Stardumb, PO Box 21445, 3300 AC Rotterdam, The Netherlands, www.stardumbrecords.com

♫ V/A – Shockout Vol 1, CD

This collection of singles and unreleased tracks from Tigerbeat6 Records' Shockout imprint compiles the lab results from the label's mashup experiment of 12-inches. The formula: Take the frenetic jaggedness of dancehall and hip-hop and rip it to shreds with glitch-core artists such as Kid 606 and Tadd Mullinix. The pairings produce varying results, from dub plaitiveness to breaks that jumpcut like aural strobe lights. Some adapt the formula to address terrorism. Others, fellatio. Contributions from 606 and Mullinix, especially, erupt with gape-mouthed fury. All of it seems to work, though, as if the apocalypse announces itself for, like, 67 minutes. (TS)

Shockout, 3358 24th St., San Francisco, CA 94110, www.tigerbeat6.com/shockout

V/A – SoFia, So Good, So What, CD

An unexpectedly affecting tune from the Stop-motion, a righteous head bobber from The Crumbs, a solid hardcore offering from Runnamucks and a spastic rocker from Against All Authority are the high points of this 21-song collection of pop punk, ska punk and hardcore bands from Florida's SoFia Records. (DAL)

SoFia Records, www.sofiarecords.com

V/A – Sunsets And Silhouettes, CD

Together, these 18 singer-songwriter, acoustic, '60s- and '70s-style indie-pop tunes establish a distinct mood, which conceals the compilation's blemishes but also hides most of the beauty marks. The warm, wintry compilation can be background music for autumn drives, shopping malls or teen television dramas. Nice to have but not essential. (JM)

Planting Seeds, PO Box 64665, Virginia Beach, VA 23467-4665, www.plantingseedsrecords.com

V/A – Take Action! Volume 4, 2xCD

This comp features heavy hitters such as NOFX, Taking Back Sunday, and Ted Leo. This 41-track compilation is not one to miss. Some proceeds from its sales go to the National Hopeline Network, so your money is going to a good place. Good songs + good bands + good cause = go out and get it. (EH)

Sub City, PO Box 7495, Van Nuys, CA, 91409, www.subcity.net

V/A – Xroxx Rocks!! Vol. 1, CD

A compilation of smaller bands featured on XROXX, a website and streaming radio station, but it reminds me of something else streaming that I have to do right now. Lots of Blink-182 clones and bad ska. TBFS probably have the best song, "Distraction." Yes, with an "i." (NS)

Xroxx, PO Box 14576, West Allis, WI 53214

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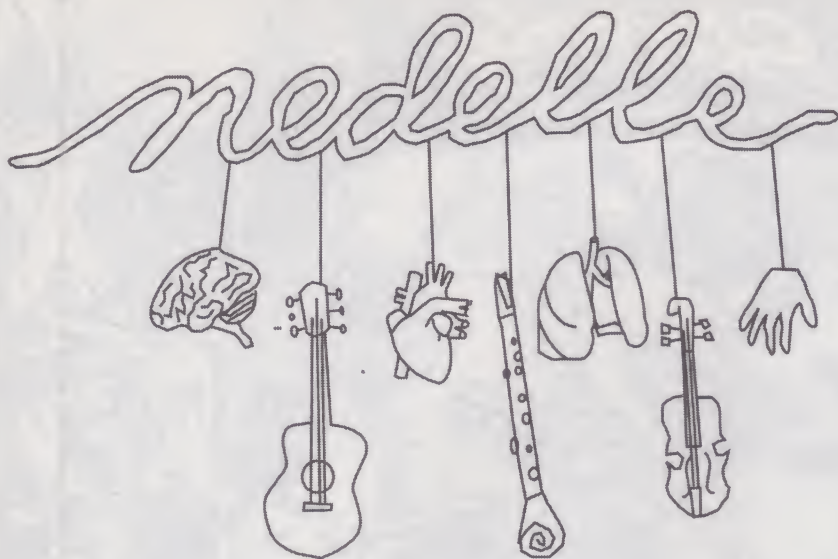
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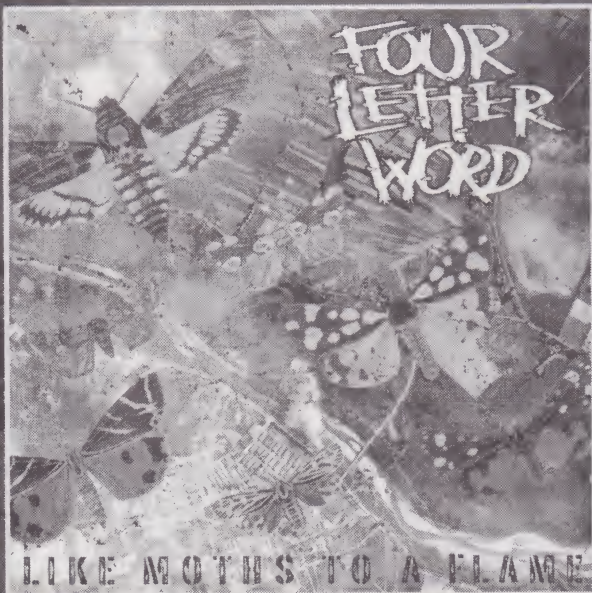


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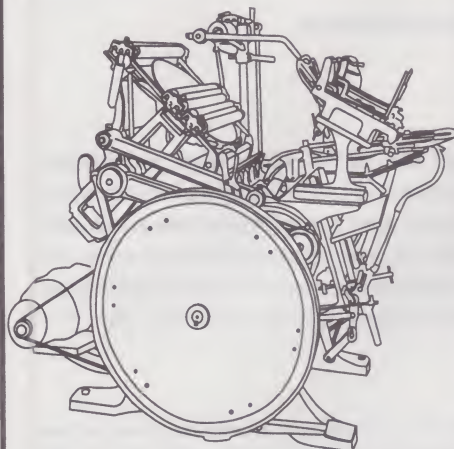
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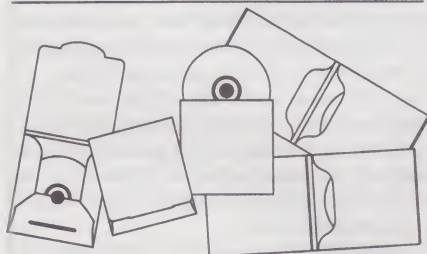
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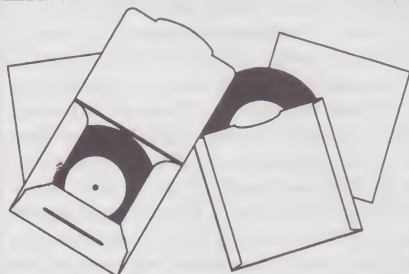
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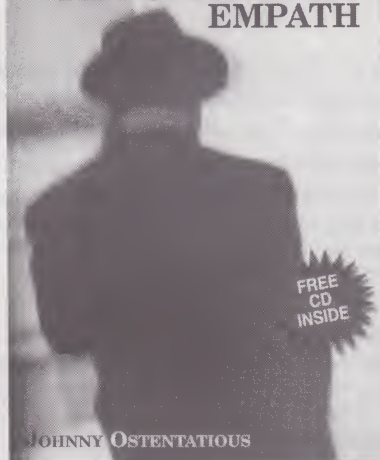
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comics

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Daphne Adair (DA), Chris Burkhalter (CB), Christa Donner (CB), Dave Elfing (DE), Janelle Hessig (JH), James Hosticka (JHA). Edited by Anne Elizabeth Moore (AEM)

FEATURE REVIEW

Badly Drawn Comic Journal, June / July 2004 **Snakepit Quarterly Edition #10, Spring 2004**

Both *Snakepit* and *Badly Drawn Comic Journal* are written by single guys who're somewhat mystified by women and staunch avoiders of full-time work. *Snakepit* features clean, three-panel summaries of each day that become redundant enough that the author could copy and paste most of it (although the party monsters did grow on me). *Badly Drawn Comic Journal* crams precious verbal minutia (some might call it logorrhea) into each frame, and the art takes a back seat. I felt a kinship with Claassen and his buddies, laughed aloud and picked up some great obnoxious catch-phrases; reading *Snakepit* just made me want to not be reading it or thinking about depressed alcoholics. But some days he makes "some serious loot selling books," so there must be other depressed alcoholics who, like the misinformed critic quoted on the back cover, feel *Snakepit* is the voice of their generation. Maybe *Snakepit* is the voice of the hard-drinking rock side of our generation and Claassen is the voice of the clever, Internet-addicted side of our generation. Which still doesn't answer the question: who the hell voted for Bush? We may never know. (DA)

[No price given], Ben Snakepit, Young American Comics, POB 49447, Austin, TX 78765 threeinverted9s@hotmail.com

\$5, Ben Claassen II, Badly Drawn Comic Journal, bendependent@yahoo.com, www.bendependent.com, 7209 25th Ave, Hyattsville, MD 20783

2 Sisters: A Super-Spy Graphic Novel

334 pages are dedicated to an epic WWII espionage adventure in which ambulance driver Elle is recruited to smuggle secret messages across international borders, then becomes an assassin, and finally emerges as a full-blown super-spy. Woven through this story are flashbacks of a pirate attack and the protagonist's childhood memories. The narrative is propelled by visuals; ten or more pages pass without a word of dialogue. This is for the best, as the dialogue that does appear tends to stumble into cliché. Kindt's at his best—and seems most comfortable—when he lets his pictures speak a thousand words. When this happens, *2 Sisters* almost seems to warrant its hefty size. Ultimately, however, the scope attempted is too expansive and the story too littered with asides that are neither pertinent nor interesting. (CB)

\$19.95, Matt Kindt, Top Shelf, ISBN 1-891830-58-9

66 Thousand Miles Per Hour

In an utterly novel approach to sequential art narrative, Cavallaro conceives of an angst ridden teenage girl who, through extraordinary circumstances, develops into a hero that can save the world. It's groundbreaking. Enough with the snark. While Cavallaro sticks to the basics of hero comics, his heroin Evie Pryce, is a well-spoken, thoughtful kid who writes journal entries that ought to be considered by the Nobel prize committee. She expresses herself in ways that Peter Parker can't—he lacks the intellectual capacity. Which is ultimately what sets *66 Thousand Miles Per Hour* apart: While Evie suddenly finds herself able to commune with the ghost of Joan d'Arc after a mishap with an electric guitar, she never loses the teenage skepticism that makes high school students so delightful to be around. While she might be able to save Squaresville from destruction, she's not sure she really wants to. (DE)

[No price given], Michael Cavallaro, True Believers Press, ISBN 0-979322-1-2

Babel #1

David B's *Epileptic* was one of the most remarkable graphic novels published, so it's no surprise that his new series, *Babel*, is pretty freakin' amazing as well. Presented as a collection of shorts—culled from childhood memories, dream diaries, mythology, and African political history—*Babel* #1 is a masterful essay on power, vulnerability, ancestry, and artmaking. B's visually and symbolically rich duotone artwork describes a complex worldview revolving around his brother's illness. This slim volume is packed with content, right down to the inner sleeves of its dust jacket. (CD)

\$9.95 US, \$12.95 CAN, David B, Drawn & Quarterly, ISBN 1-894937-78-3

Canvas

Impressive for a first full-length work, the story is earnest but standard-issue adolescent anxiety fare, revolving around a 15-year-old girl's awkward early brushes with sex. A little Degrossi, this is a story of hickies, crushes, blowjobs, rivalries, tetherball, and cheap beer, and the book's biggest liability is its decision to take on such well-tread topical territory. However, Fellows manages to mine decent stuff out of generic plots and, to be fair, the story distances itself from after-school special material by continually retaining near-bulletproof plausibility (although, did I mention that Canvas's parents are a pig and a frog?), never moralizing, and keeping his authorial compassion muted. His characters are both unpredictable and guarded, which makes them more convincing as well as more dynamic. Probably this kind of teen drama story isn't a niche that needed any more attention, but it's nevertheless too assured to dismiss. (CB)

\$9.95, Alex Fellows, Fantagraphics, 7563 Lake City Wy NE, Seattle, WA 98115

Changers, The

As sci-fi, the science contained in this comic book is fairly casual, and the work itself is more personal and compelling than action-packed. The story is a vehicle for the author's concerns, and he reveals himself as sensitively conversant in philosophy and morality. His characters are met, even at their worst, with firm compassion and respect as they ponder motivation, action, and consequence. Author Daniels is a strong and attentive storyteller, although the fictional essays included were heavy-handed and polemic. The illustration is highly graphical, sometimes to the point of being belabored. But his thick outlines have the nice effect of insulating the characters and their emotions and, while his panels and timing are not very well developed, his lush use of gutter space helps more richly cultivate the mystery, vastness, and immensity of his fantasy. The author is too apparent in the work, but overall it's a decent comic. (JHA)

\$8.95, Ezra Clayton Daniels, Dream Chocolate, www.dream-chocolate.com

Classic Pin-Up Art Of Jack Cole, The

After leaving the world of Plastic Man, his most notable creation, Jack Cole went on to draw staggeringly beautiful and impossibly buxom women. Were this his only skill, he'd not have made it as a pin-up artist: his work was often featured Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*, so readers didn't have to look far for the real thing. Cole's brilliance came not from his women, but from his short, overweight, balding men. These portly, slaving, idiots are captured beautifully in Cole's early work, drawn originally for *Humorama* magazine and collected in a new Fantagraphics release. Cole's men represent the

commonplace and ordinary; they are men utterly taken with the *Playboy* fantasy and ready to sacrifice all in an effort to attain it. His art is about big tits and perfect asses, but it speaks to much more. (DE)

\$19.95, Jack Cole, Alex Chun Ed., Fantagraphics, ISBN 1-1-56097-8

Dogs and Water

We're on an endless walk in unidentified country with only a stuffed bear (who deluded us into this venture) to attend. It looks like war, it looks barren, and it's hard to tell who to be loyal to when even the bear is totally unconcerned with whether we live or die. Should we turn back? There are guns and a time to use them, dogs for companionship, and ethereal blue-line dream sequences that lend a whole other level of fascination to the story: We can't turn back.

Thanks to Nilsen's vast, lonely drawings of the boy's (and his bear's) journey, the reader almost floats along inside the story, instead of reading it. Each moment is simply there to be lived, from witnessing the dead to sleeping with dogs to shooting a dying man. But this war story is not too dreadful to finish; *Dogs and Water* is beautiful, a bit expensive, but a good investment in empathy. (DA)

\$9.95 US/\$12.95 CAN, Anders Nilsen, Drawn and Quarterly, www.drawnandquarterly.com, POB 48056, Montreal, Quebec, Canada/H2V 4S8

It Disappears

Nate Powell's pencils are to be admired. With *It Disappears* I was in the hands of a dexterous illustrator with an expressive style and a talent for striking composition, and yet . . . Delving into the intangible and mysterious, *It Disappears* takes on a surreal quality not far elevated from that of a dream journal. And dream journals that aren't your own are tedious. This fails to be fertile soil for the attempts at profundity found here. Powell is deft at evoking an eerie anxiety of the unknowable, but never reveals himself as qualified to actually pontificate on such erudition in a public forum. Furthermore, the writing seems to suggest some specific underlying content, but doesn't offer enough to piece together anything close to an intended meaning or even a confident interpretation. In the end, I can't even make out the story, never mind what it's supposed to be doing. (CB)

\$7.95, Nate Powell, Soft Skull Press, ISBN 1-932360-37-9

Jennifer Daydreamer #2: Anna & Eva

Anna & Eva is an inverted orphan story that cares nothing for grown-up, rational worlds and relies on elaborate variations in pacing to incite marvel and wonder. A reader who presses on too quickly will get hung up on the random introduction of characters in the second half of the story. What is introduced as a dying, sad and lonely circus turns out to teem with acro-



bats, clowns, and contortionists, attractive to miscellaneous soul-thieves and swindlers with next-to-no connection to our heroines Anna and Eva. Take it as a parable of good and evil, take it as a gentle introduction into the world of mysticism and circuses, or take it to a child who dreams of escape, enchantment, and twinhood and see what she has to say. Overall, the visceral, clear-lined illustrations, elegantly varied page compositions (especially at the beginning) and well-chosen moments of narration make it a peaceful, simple read worth keeping around. (DA)

\$4.95, Jennifer Daydreamer, Top Shelf, www.topshelfcomix.com or POB 1282, Marietta, GA, 30061-1282

La Perdida #4

This fourth installment of five continues the saga of Carla, a naive 20-something of Mexican descent who moves to Mexico in search of her roots and finds a mess of trouble instead. In this issue our heroine worries and rants about her missing lowlife boyfriend, although it's his illegal activities that finally get the plot moving. Featuring wraparound cover art and packed with cultural tidbits (and Mexican swears!), *La Perdida* is just slightly more interesting than your average hipster drama. (CD)

\$4.95 US, \$7.45 CAN, Jessica Abel, Fantagraphics, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115, www.fantagraphics.com

Lizard of Oz, The

Shortly before his notorious death, Vaughn Bodé laid down preliminary work for a never-completed *Oz* send-up. Years later, progeny Mark Bodé slapped together a story that looks and reads convincingly like something his father might've penned. Here Dorothy's a foul-mouthed waif, the Scarecrow a hemp-stuffed taxidermy lizard with a grudge, the tin man obsessed with laying an oil drum, and the lion a "pussy-ass" pinning for some balls. Other characters include the Bitchy Bitch, the Good Fellatio Fairy, the Whores of a Different Color, and naturally the lovable Cheech Wizard. A faithful retread of the well-known story as a springboard for coarse humor, it's hardly what you'd call innovative satire. I'll bypass discussing the sexual politics—those familiar with Bodé already know where they stand, and there's nothing I could tell the uninitiated that'll alter receptions of such polarizing material. (CB)

\$12.95, Mark Bodé, based on the work of Vaughn Bodé, Fantagraphics, ISBN 1-56097-595-4

Octopi and the Ocean, The

A prologue recounts how regular octopus marriage rituals keep the ocean in an elemental balance, overpowering the savage brutality of the sharks with the cerebral even-handedness of the octopi. Sadly, preoccupation with such daily tedium as laundry and dish-washing distract the octopi, and the sharks abscond with an artifact necessary to the ceremonies, thus seizing control of the open waters. At this point things take a sharp turn for the fantastical, involving a plot to enlist an unwitting human child to recover the stolen artifact. Ghost Shrimp graphic designer Dan James serves up consistently excellent woodcut-like illustrations that're fanciful and clever without being precious. Even if I was regularly unsure what the willfully inane story was doing, James' stylistic flexing drew me on and made every page worth reading. Such whimsy might prove exasperating in a longer format, but at 56 pages I was pretty darned into it. (CB)

\$6.95, Dan James, www.ghostshrimp.net, Top Shelf, www.topshelfcomix.com or POB 1282, Marietta, GA, 30061-1282

Of Two Minds

This "American Shoujo story" (per the author) reads like a rip-off *Sweet Valley High* novel and is drawn like, well, any manga you can find in a vaguely urban Border's. A post-high-school graduation trip to Europe for beautiful brother-sister twins turns into "love triangles, angst, sex and psychic powers," again, according to the introduction page. I expect it to devolve into romance-novel-style near-porn, but you can find out online for yourself. (DA)

[No price given], Allie Dyal and Kim Smirga, www.of2minds.studioantithesis.com

Ogner Stump's One Thousand Sorrows

Twenty-five of a proposed 1,000 sorrows are chronicled in this charmingly demented book, including Disease, Employment, Eggs, Gravity, and Triangles. I can't wait to see more. Goldfarb's graphic sensibility is appropriately weird and consistently strong: bold blacks, tiny patterns,

and dynamic text animate every surreal scene with a buzzing discomfort that suits the content perfectly. The cover design, unfortunately, doesn't do the linework justice. (CD)

\$9.00 US, \$13.00 CAN, A. Goldfarb, Wonderella Printed, ISBN 1-58505-131-4-50900

Or Else #1

A collection of disparate work kicks off Kevin Huizenga's new series. The first full story is "NST'04," one of several involving Huizenga's regular character Glenn Ganges, and is set alternately in a cemetery and an all-night burger joint. Next is a short that incorporates voice bubbles, but not words. Next is a story with a visual backdrop that has no obvious correlation to the accompanying prose story. Finally there's an illustrated explanation of the Jeezoh statues found in cemeteries. Taken as a whole, I can't help but be impressed by the range of Huizenga's abilities, and I have to applaud his attempts to flirt with the boundaries of the medium, although taken individually, none of the stories grabbed me. (CB)

\$3.50, Kevin Huizenga, Drawn and Quarterly, PO Box 48056, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, H2V 4S8, www.drawnandquarterly.com

Owly: The Way Home & Bittersweet Summer

Owly is an all-ages comic about a cute owl and his friends, all of whom communicate without words, their speech bubbles filled with simple images. This technique gets muddled when text does appear as sound effects, plant labels, and a captioned "photo album" of Owly and pals. I prefer comics with more substance than this, but it's a nice book for any young ornithologist. (CD)

\$10.00, Andy Runtton, Top Shelf, ISBN 1-891830-62-7

Pills

With Kinko's production values and square-paneled simplicity, Ben Snakepit's *Pills* looks to be another indie comic homage to a beautiful relationship: one of those books drawn not for general readers, but to impress present and future girlfriends with a display of caring and sensitivity. But Mr. Snakepit's comic manages far more in its few pages. He tracks an ill-conceived marriage from dorm-room beginnings, through a punk-band apex, and into an attempted suicide conclusion. It's a story that leaves you tired, broken, and with an understanding of just why it is everyone is on some kind of anti-depressant. What more could be asked of a comic book? (DE)

\$2, Ben Snakepit, Young American Comics, youngamericancomics.com

Return Of The Elephant

Despite maintaining a mild tone throughout, *Elephant* stacks the tension of its two middle-aged characters' banal but uneasy conversation until it's clear there's more going on than keenly observed social interaction. Frankly, I was a little disappointed that this deftly scripted exchange turned out to lead to something uncomfortable on a deeper level. What I object to is the guessing game the story encourages, the reader trying to ascertain the nature of the pair's uncertain relationship. Ultimately, Hornschemeier's capable storytelling means greatly impressed me, even if the story took turns at odds with my narrative preferences. And the comic looks great, printed with brown ink and with austere expanses of white space between each uniformly sized panel. (CB)

\$6.00, Paul Hornschemeier, AdHouse Books, 1224 Greycourt Ave, Richmond, VA 23227-4042

Shape Shifter

Attacked by an enemy spacecraft, an alien crash-lands on Earth. As you might've gathered from the title, the alien has the ability to change shape. Disguising itself as a tricked-out turntable to hide from its foes, it falls into the hands of young Frank, who happens to have a DJ battle scheduled for the coming evening. This has a nice children's cartoon feel to it, and in fact will probably be well liked by kids. Notably, artist John Isaacson teaches after-school cartooning classes in the Bay Area. (CB)

\$3.00, John Isaacson, Cartoon Animal Channels, 3022 Fulton St, Berkeley, CA 94705, johnisaacson@hotmail.com

Shouldn't You Be Working?

It is immensely satisfying to see Dagwood Bumstead and his boss finally having it out in a bloody, vaguely homoerotic fight to the death on the cover of Ryan's second volume of sketches produced at work. Beyond

this, however, there is almost nothing redeeming about Ryan's drawings. He glorifies the scatological and depicts sexual congress with a skill rarely seen beyond elementary school. But to see only this fetid surface is to miss the point. Ryan has captured—with astonishing clarity—the intellect-sapping boredom that is 9-to-5 office work. Given the context of the cubicle, his bathroom humor makes perfect and painful sense. (DE)

\$5.95, Johnny Ryan, Fantagraphics, fantagraphics.com

Sketchbook Diaries Vol. 4

It's hard to read through Kolchalka's autobiographical comic strips without thinking of the brilliant anti-humor of Scott Dikkers and Jim's Journal. But where the existential trials of Jim manage a certain hilarity, the day to day musings of Kolchalka fall flat. Arguably, this is because Kolchalka isn't going for a laugh; he's just offering readers a glimpse of his life via elfin' alter-ego. But because that life is so unerringly pleasant—beautiful relationships with girlfriend, a happy cat, rocking out with the band, drawing comics—his journal reads as a boring ledger of events in a life that's better and more interesting than yours. (DE)

James Kolchalka, Top Shelf, www.topshelfcomix.com or POB 1282, Marietta, GA, 30061-1282

Stuff Of Dreams, The #2: Alias The Cat

Kim Deitch writes a genuinely fascinating story about an incident in which his wife Pam bought a peculiar cat suit on eBay and discovered its ties to *Alias* the Cat, a WWI-era comic strip and film serial. Deitch becomes obsessed with learning as much as he can about this *Alias* the Cat. He acquires a collection of old New Jersey newspapers that ran the strip, and finds unsettling parallels between the strip's fictional events and the real-life happenings of the town that served as the story's setting. Deitch's respect and enthusiasm for the earnest research of outdated pop culture is contagious. Even if this story is fictional (and I presume most of it is), each new development feels like a revelation. (CB)

\$4.95, Kim Deitch, Fantagraphics, 7563 Lake City Way NE, Seattle, WA 98115

things are meaning less

This book is selfish with no redemption. If one finds life so annoying and useless, one shouldn't write so much about it. Burian's thrust is puerile and the despair is an obvious and affected choice. Moreover, why is this book a comic? There is nothing essential voiced through the comics form here. (JHA)

\$8.00, Al Burian, microcosm publishing, ISBN 0-9726967-3-3

Urban Hipster #1 and #2

The series opens with a slacker manifesto that is equal parts passive-aggressive and ostentatious, which is a little awkward since the stories are better than that. The books are made up of a single narrative broken up by smaller stories and incidental pieces. The principal story follows the lives of two struggling hip girls. Don't be mistaken: their lives are absolutely your typical 20-something fare, yet the authors do a pretty good job of interesting the reader in the awkward crushes and hurt feelings of the characters—and to that end it is a nice little guilty pleasure. But the best work is in the short stories and ambient pieces. (JHA)

\$4.50/\$2.95, David Lasky/Greg Stump, Alternative Comics, www.indyworld.com/uh

Van Helsing's Night Off

I really can't say enough about this slim volume by Austrian comic artist Nicolas Mahler. A genius of shorthand, Mahler takes such figures as the Wolf Man, Frankenstein, and Van Helsing, and zooms in on their most obvious distinguishing features. Rather than flesh them out into complex characters, Mahler considers the crucial trait of, say, the Mummy to be the fact that he's a guy wrapped in bandages. The trials he subjects these characters to are no more complex, literally running them through "Invisible Man walks into a bar" scenarios with dry punch lines. Complimenting this, Mahler's reductive technique, one of seemingly slapdash sketches, pares down the level of expressive detail, magnifying each character's emotive range exponentially. Piecemeal, these hilarious strips could fit nicely in something like *The New Yorker*. Taken as a whole they're a singular pleasure recommended to all. (CB)

\$12.95 Nicolas Mahler, Top Shelf, ISBN 1-891830-38-4

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books

Edited by Joe Meno

DELIVER ME FROM NOWHERE

an interview with Tennessee Jones

It seems most books and movies want us to believe that only people living on either coast live a life worth telling—it's rare to hear about a new novel or film that addresses what it's like to live anywhere in the middle. Perhaps it is this kind of gaping ignorance on the part of our modern media that led many middlewesterners to gravitate towards the "down-home" condescending moralism of our most recent and terrible president. Unlike the America depicted in anti-gay marriage referendums and flag-waving TV ads, Tennessee Jones' rural landscape is an honest rendering of what many of us who grew up in Middle America know to be true: that there are some great stories hidden in this part of the country. Building on the tradition of small-town scribes like Sherwood Anderson and the gothic tragedy of Flannery O'Connor, Jones' *Deliver Me From Nowhere* is a sparsely-drawn, introspective collection about the loneliness of the open land. What's surprising about the work is its simplicity: there are no tricks here, no post-modern footnotes or witty fonts or intellectual arguments. It speaks of a surety in the material, a writer who knows there is something meaningful in the tale he is telling. Tennessee talked about making the transition from his ongoing zine *Teenage Death Songs* to the short story form and how Bruce Springsteen affected the creation of this particular work.

Sometimes I think the majority of the New York publishing world would have us believe that outside of Manhattan there are no stories worth telling. Your book depicts

a Middle America that has been largely ignored in recent works of fiction.

A strange thing happens in New York: You forget the rest of the world exists because you're at the front of the moving train of civilization. Before writing this book, I took a month-long trip to the Midwest and West. It was a car trip, and we avoided cities and slept out every night. Much of that land is wide open, desolate, and breathtakingly beautiful. It mirrors the state of many of the characters, most of whom are in a place of transition, or have let go of their moral, spiritual, or physical hold on the world. Place is important because it shapes not only a person's opportunities and economic choices, but in many instances their aesthetic and spiritual ones as well.

The book draws heavily from Bruce Springsteen's 1982 album *Nebraska*—why?

This book exists because of that album. Each story is based on a song. Though I used some of his characters, I also invented quite a few and expounded heavily on the existing ones. What I wanted to explore most is what I consider to be the crux of the album: that place where a person loses hold on the realities they've come to know and must face the question of whether or not redemption or deliverance is actually possible.

What's the transition been like for you moving from writing your zine to writing short stories?

The biggest difference between these two forms is that when I'm writing zines, I feel like I am writing to a group of people that I can put faces to. The zines are love letters to people I

might know or come to know. The stories are for everyone.

What was the inspiration for the story "Atlantic City?" It's a gem.

Atlantic City was the most difficult story in the book to write and was the last completed. I knew that I wanted to preserve the essence of the song, which is incredibly sad and hopeful, but sad beyond hopeful. In the end, I spoke to my mother one night and she began telling me stories about my grandparents, who worked the night shift as janitors in a textile factory in addition to farming. That story coupled with a final visit to Atlantic City finally enabled me to finish.

What's so striking about the book is the variance of characters, young, old, male, female. As a female-to-male transsexual from Appalachia living in New York City, do you feel it's necessary and important to have the freedom to write about characters whose lives may fall outside your own personal life experience?

It's arguable as to whether or not there are human experiences that transcend the politics of race, class, gender, and cultural differences, or whether human experiences of the "universal"—love, pain, joy, sadness, nostalgia, hope, longing—are first and foremost affected by politics and society. As the kind of writer I am, I have to believe that there are experiences that can be called universal. I don't want to speak to just trans people or white people or queer people or aging punks. There is too much to know, and too much the world has to offer. I want to speak to anyone who isn't afraid of facing all the horror, wonder, and joy living has to offer.

Get *Deliver Me from Nowhere* from Soft Skull Press: www.softskullpress.com

Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground

Maria Raha

Seal Press

Cinderella's Big Score: Women of the Punk and Indie Underground answers that sticky "women in (fill in the blank)" question with a broad, chronological study from the late '70s on. It's packed with information—Maria Raha profiles 34 artists and groups, detailing the 'hows' of getting the bands together, early influences, career trajectories, and 'where are they now' summaries. Each decade is introduced with the cultural context of America (and in the 1970s, Britain as well)—the politics and the bland or offensive mainstream music choices—that elicited these individual rebellions. Raha has done her research, and the resulting capsule accounts of bands from Crass to Erase Errata combine into a tangible thread of music history. Her selections are thoughtful and thought-provoking, and the resulting essays expose both the range and commonalities of experience.

The material presented is so compelling, yet Raha can get lost in her bias, which posits hardship and lack of recognition as blanket truths. The women featured have clearly struggled against gender bias from all angles—all the more heartbreaking when the most vehement attacks came from within the punk and indie communities. But it is a limited, and limiting, standpoint that can be at times defensive, reaching, or even-handedly superlative. It's a standpoint that leaves Raha prone to overusing adjectives like "quintessential," "pioneering," and "seminal." Though a strong slant adds cohesion, the stories would be better without it. And since the focus doesn't stray from those 'hows' of becoming a viable band, the subtler, often more interesting 'whys' go unanswered. Maybe a good companion book would be Lauraine Leblanc's *Pretty in Punk: Girls' Gender Resistance in a Boys' Subculture* (Rutgers University Press), which looks at the personal and societal dynamics that provoke this kind of feminine rebellion. Overall, though, *Cinderella* is a good read and needed celebration of diverse and dynamic artists. —**Katje Richstatter**

McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories

edited by Michael Chabon

McSweeney's

I dig weird fiction; untrustworthy narrators, creeping horrors, dreams of other worlds, restless spirits—count me in. But the same things that make weird tales great are also those that threaten it most. A poorly executed weird tale can be boring, it can frustrate you, it can have no pay-off or make no sense. *McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories* attempts to present 15 good, weird genre fiction stories written by well-known authors. The result is something of a mixed bag, but overall the book is a success.

Here are some high and low points from the collection, presented in the order that I read them, which was random: Stephen King sleepwalks through yet another story about a successful writer suffering a traumatic episode. Joyce Carol Oates gives selections from the tense, gruesome diary of an isolated lighthouse-keeper in a wicked homage to Edgar Allan Poe (that regrettably dicks over HP Lovecraft, to whom the story also owes plenty, by not mentioning him). The mysterious door in Steve Erickson's "Zeroville" may or may not have been intended as a symbolic vagina, but that's how I took it. Margaret Atwood's "Lusus Naturae" starts off like a whisper, then suddenly springs from the page and blindsides you. Jason Roberts alone makes the book worth the price of admission: "7C" won the first annual August Van Zorn Prize for the Weird Short Story, and you can see why—it's like Phillip K. Dick but blood-soaked and visceral. Roberts has never published fiction before, but hopefully he will again. David Mitchell's seamy Hawaiian underbelly is almost giddily cool, but I'm still not sure why what happened is what happened. Jonathan Lethem may have written the most literary, though not the most astonishing, story of the bunch. Peter Straub blows his occasional writing partner (King) out of the water with "Mr. Aickman's Air Rifle"; the writing pulses, the plot gets weirder with perfect rhythm, the end is ambiguous—it's everything an astonishing sto-

ry should be (and everything King's obviously unedited scattershot wasn't). Poppy Z Brite foregoes blood and guts in favor of a charming, awkward ghost story with a (gasp) happy ending.

One final note: of the 15 stories five are by women, which is no small thing in the boy's club of genre fiction. —**Justin Taylor**

Brotherhood of Corruption

Juan Antonio Juarez

Chicago Review Press

Juan Antonio Juarez served in the Chicago Police Department for seven years, first as a beat officer, then in the narcotics division. From the stealing of suspects' cash to the unnecessary use of violence on a lot of perpetrators, Juarez saw it all. *Brotherhood of Corruption* follows his career as a police officer and into his personal life too, including the constant battle he faced between his devotion to his lovely girlfriend Ana and the blouse-unbuttoning power that comes with a uniform.

All of it makes for good reading, though there were some parts that actually affected me physically. I squirmed in my chair out of helpless aggravation when a cop shattered the reflector on a homeless man's bike for doing nothing more than trying to avoid the rain under an overpass. *Brotherhood of Corruption* is Juan Juarez telling his story, and part of me did want him to tell it more like he would to his fellows boys in blue at the bar (which you do get flashes of through dialogue). Instead, there are times when the voice switches to something I don't feel is entirely his, with sentences like, "I didn't know if I had enough to cover the libation." However, there's absolutely nothing that can replace the fearlessness and honesty he shows in exposing his life and the daily operations of the police force, particularly its very slanted take on the war on drugs. It's this raw truthfulness that will keep you reading and remembering long after the sirens have quieted down. —**Jimmy Vickery**

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zines

THIS ISSUE'S REVIEWERS: Abbie Amadio (AJA), Amy Adoyzie (AA), Joe Biel (JB), Ari Charney (AC), Vincent Chung (VC), Lisa Groshong (LG), Dan Laidman (DAL), Anne Elizabeth Moore (AEM), Brian Moss (BM), Claire Sewell (CS)

Accidental Pornography #1

We don't attend Willamette University, but this zine's guide to the top 10 bathrooms in which to take a dump was goddamn funny, particularly the passage about the bathroom on the all girls' floor. Another silly feature, the "Guide to Being Subversive," contains the helpful passage "Getting Caught by The Man." (AC)

\$2 or trade, 1343 Saginaw St., Salem, OR 97301, RayFlight@aol.com

Accidental Pornography #2

Willamette University students (the self-proclaimed "Freaks 'n Geeks" student group) contribute eccentric and inspired tidbits of their micro-cosmic rural town. In typical geek fashion, it's filled with in-jokes and immature humor. It's not hard to believe that these folks spend all of their Friday nights together doing uncool things. (VC)

\$2 or trade, Ryan Rogers, 1343 Saginaw St., Salem, OR 97301, RayFlight@aol.com

Accidental Pornography #3

AP is published by the Freaks and Geeks of Willamette University, a group of students who are clearly have fun producing their funky little zine full of homemade Mad Libs and random quotes. The whole thing reads like an inside joke that's actually funny to other people. (LG)

\$2 or trade, Ryan Rogers, 1343 Saginaw St., Salem, OR 97301, rayflight@aol.com

All Skewed Up: Musings On Cold Hands Dead Heart And Selections From #1-14

Mike Twohig reflects on his artistic style, background, methods, the basis and inspirations for his drawings, and everything in-between related to his work. It makes for interesting reading. Also, taken is a good sampling of his drawings representative of the techniques he discusses, which makes up a nice collection of illustrations. (AJA)

\$4 or trade, Mike Twohig, 72-1 Meadow Farm South, North Chili, NY 14514, www.angel-fire.com/III/miketwohig

Amber The Arsonist #11

A one-sheet newsletter zine filled with not-so-useful book reviews, so-so record reviews and pretty good zine reviews. But the best part of this zine are all of the weird quotes strewn about for our amusement: "I don't think there are enough movies that show Jesus as a superhero." (AA)

Stamp or trade. PO Box 1582, Piscataway, NJ 08855-1582, rsducky@hotmail.com

Anti-Media #3

Chris' previous attempts at documenting his adult-videostore employee existence were sad tales of pervers and desperation, reeking of self-loathing and terminal boredom. This issue continues on, but meanders to babbling where his snarky condescension evolves into a boring superiority complex. Lose the 'tude, but keep it rude, dude! (VC)

Free/postage, Chris Miller, 59 Greene St., Pawtucket, RI 02860, http://crappytoons.tripod.com

Arthur, Nov 2004

This looked promising until I opened it up and the bulk of the contents was advertisements, and the articles were sparse. Highlights did include David Cross talking about GW's re-election and a big article about the

yuppies. (JB)

\$5, Lime Publishing, 13104 Cotton Ln., Gathersburg, MD 20878 www.arthurmag.com

Banana King, The #1

There are lots of short stories here, some fiction and some nonfiction, including "My Naked Father" and "The Bratwurst Factory." Plus there's an interview with The Streets. I couldn't get into this, in all honesty, but if you're looking for a left-of-center anthology, then it might be for you. (CS)

No price given, the_banana_king@att.net

Birdland #1

Birdland was produced by a motley collective of inmates at Soledad State Prison in California. The main feature is an account of a road trip written in what's apparently a deliberate parody of Hunter S. Thompson's overwrought ramble. Poetry and essays that allude to the prison experience round out the contents. (AC)

\$2, trade or free to prisoners, 109 Arnold Avenue, Cranston, RI 02905, http://fanorama.tk

Blasphunny Pages, The #1

This zine covers a lot of the usual ground (coming out, ranting against cars, crappy jobs) but in a more engaging way than most, gaining much of its strength from strong writing, great drawings and large pages that give the content space to spread out and shine. (LG)

\$33.80, Matt Runkle, 846 NE Liberty St., Portland, OR 97211, enkamiddle@hotmail.com

Bone Marimba #2

Maybe I'm jaded, but I'm sick to death of zines about riding the Greyhound and working crap jobs. The little vignettes that round out Bone Marimba are too random for me to comprehend. I give up. (LG)

\$1.50, Brent Johnson, 230 South Dodge St., Iowa City, IA 52240, bonemarimba@hotmail.com

Chairman Of The Bored #22

Written by punks incarcerated in California and Ohio, COB is one of the more intelligent and interesting prison zines out there. Considering the imaginative cut-and-paste design and snappy commentary on the insanity of the prison system, I can forgive some stupidity, like an idiotic rant about suburban kids. (LG)

\$3/free to prisoners, Fanorama Society, 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905; fanoramal@aol.com, www.fanorama.tk

Color Me And You Fishbowl

Tired of lame cartoon characters and connect the dots? Then this crazy little coloring book just might be for you. At times slightly political and at other just plain goofy, these images aren't your typical kiddie fare. I have a strange desire to break out the map pencils, though, and get to coloring. (CS)

\$1, World In Trouble, PO Box 14007, Minneapolis, MN 55414, maxarouse@yahoo.com

Comics Interpreter #2, Vol 2

In-depth, well-written analysis of the world of comics, big and small. Stan Lee, self-published work, and James Kochalka are all mentioned in these pages and with a lot of interest and passion for the craft as well. (JB)

\$5.95, comicsmag@yahoo.com

Crippled By Depression: Why Don't Nobody Love Me?

A series of posted personal ads where our host, Adam, pokes fun at himself as a "loser artist" and presents himself in a very self-deprecating manner. Then we get to read the series of responses to each one ranging from people feeling sorry for him to making fun of him, to offering to hang out with him. It's pretty entertaining up until the point when he starts to ask all the women "wanna fuck?" It's quite painful because I know Adam Beebe is "performing" here and has more potential respect and social skills than that. It's a good afternoon laugh if you can deal with that. (JB)

\$4, Mishap, 941 56th St., Oakland, CA 94608

A Dangerous Game #1 and #2

Half of this double issue covers noise (Locust, Flying Luttenbachers, Wolf Eyes, Orthrelm) while the other covers metal (Entombed, Nile, Isis, Godflesh). By including strictly interviews, they minimize the typical kiss-assy, music-zine bullshit. With more of a critical eye on what they love, this would be solidly satisfying. (VC)

\$3, 608-C Haight St., San Francisco, CA 94117, adangerousgame@mallcan.com

Designs For Things I'll Never Make

This exceedingly charming zine features about 20 detailed diagrams of fantastically imaginative, Rube Goldberg-esque contraptions. Some of Ben Claassen's designs are mired in kitsch, like the coffee table made out of a giant resin-coated pizza, and supported by four resin-coated pizza slice legs. Others are reminiscent of the Jetsonian world of tomorrow, such as the "Swirly Bathub," a cylindrical bathing chamber that blends shower and carwash technology. The artist has starred those designs which he actually created, and they can be viewed on the website listed below. Sadly, we couldn't locate a picture of his "Dancing Suit," which purportedly utilizes a number of rings and motors to compel the unwilling dancer's body to gyrate according to some preprogrammed dance moves. According to Claassen, the "dancer could just stand there assessing the situation while his dancing suit does all the work." We must admit that we were hoping that we had stumbled upon some obscure, naive folk art genius. But, Claassen's website indicates that he is a prolific and accomplished young artist, dabbling in painting, photography, comics and furniture design. While some zine enthusiasts may balk at the price, we definitely recommend its purchase. (AC)

\$4, 7209 25th Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20783, www.bendependent.com

A Dumb Little Book About Love

At 2.5 inches by 2 inches, with 13 pages and 13 simple line drawings, Ben has been able to capture every emotion ever eeked out from our black, black hearts. We follow the love life of a heart, with two stringy legs and boots. The "break up" marks the first page, and we follow through the "rebound," to seeing your ex again, the trouble with divvying up friends and on and on and on as you read and nod and agree on every page. The words are few, but the little pictures say enough in the most succinct way. This is the kinda zine that makes you scratch your head and wonder if perhaps Mr. Ben Claassen III had swallowed some sort of magical shrinking pill that allowed him to shrivel down to the size of an atom and

jump into your veins and into your heart to follow its sad journey. (AA)
\$1. 7209 25th Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20873, www.bendependent.com

A Dumb Little Book About Heavy Metal

God damn, Ben is awesome! How the hell do you not immediately fall in love with a minicomic zine that begins with a shout-out to Ricky Rachtman and then goes in the "Heavy Metal ABCs": "A is for Assholes, Thrashing in the pit! B is for Bitches, who sucked Axl Rose's dick."? You can't deny that! (AA)
\$1. 7209 25th Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20873, www.bendependent.com

A Dumb Little Book About Smurfs

Dear god, it's me, Amy. Can you make Ben Claassen III marry me? Have you seen this comic, where the Smurfs are total dickwads, and it's the best thing ever! They say things like, "That Slurpee made my shit turn brown!" and "Good god I hate white people!" Hook a sistah up! (AA)
\$1. 7209 25th Ave., Hyattsville, MD 20873, www.bendependent.com

Educational Tourist

Dara chronicles her 13-day trip to Cuba in great detail. She meets many people along the way and does a good job of attempting to see the country with unbiased eyes. Dara obviously recognized that it can be hard to get real, truthful information about Cuba, and her observations are straightforward. From visiting the ISA to Hammel Alley (a multifunctional, independent art space and a rare place in Cuba) and the former slave prisons of Matanzas, she records her personal reactions as well as the thoughts of those she meets. Dara also questions her own role as a white tourist in the country and grapples with Cuba's socialism as compared to the U.S.'s democracy. Hers is a well-reasoned account, as opposed to a simple travel zine. She ends it with a page of questions, which is a nice metaphor for the fascinating enigma that is Cuba. Highly recommended. (CS)

No price given, dawa@pinkbloque.org

Flakes

Flakes is in a handwritten newsletter format. The writer chronicles his pursuit of Budweiser longneck and bong-fueled wastedness, subsidized by dead-end jobs and low-rent couch crashing. The narrator may be jaded, but he's still a sucker for the beauty of a sunset while lazing on the beach in a stoney haze. (AC)

Free with stamps, 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905, <http://fanorama.tk>

Fran Magazine, Vol. 2, Issue 4

I wanted to like Fran, but I just didn't. It's a bit like the high school class clown who tries too hard. The Kimya Dawson piece was good, but I wished the interview had been longer. Music reviews are included, although I can hardly figure out why. (CS)

\$4, PO Box 291459, Los Angeles, CA 90029, www.franmagazine.com

Freak Tension #11

A juvenile attack on the senses, this would have changed my life as a teenager. Funny anecdotes, pranks, insulting record reviews, ads and a fiction story. Great for people who like to poke fun at every last thing they encounter and walk away laughing. (JB)

No price given, Matthew Johnson PO Box 22163 Green Bay, WI 54305 freaktension@yahoo.com

Get Bent, Bent Kockman #1

This zine starts with a hilarious and brutal description of riding the bus with Japanese special-ed kids. Unfortunately, that's the high point. The remainder of the zine mainly fixates on shit and semen, though there are some funny bits featuring cartoons with rewritten word balloons. (LG)

No price given, nowinJapan@nifty.com

Girlyhead #5

It's the "Sailors, Sirens, and Strippers" issue, oh my! The stories and articles are fun, interesting and make you think, "Awesome!" Highlights include ventures into the land of stripper-dom and burlesque; interview with David Cross; and an exhaustive guide to all-girl tribute bands like AC/DSHE, Cheap Chick, Ms. Fits and more. (AA)

\$3.95, PO Box 225029, San Francisco, CA 94122, www.girlyhead.com

Green Anarchy #18

This anti-civilization journal offers an awkward amalgam of extreme

right and extreme left politics. The essayists opine about the downfall of civilization with straight-faced pedantry, but their outlandish views might go down better if leavened with a little humor. Still, we'd love to listen in on all the paranoia at their next vegan potluck. (AC)

\$4, PO Box 11331, Eugene, OR 97440, www.greenanarchy.org

Here It Is #2

Normally I would describe Erin Tobey's work as "cute" and "charming," but this time around it seems more "thoughtful" and "introspective." She evaluates the space-time continuum, fearing her brother might die, an analysis of friendship via The Procession of Simulacra and some frequent reflections on love and her lack of it. Dare I use the word, but this issue is more reflective of a more "mature" Erin Tobey, a truly talented individual who seems to create things naturally. It also has some beautifully rendered, multicolored stencil prints on the cover. Highly recommended. (JB)

\$1.50, Erin Tobey, PO Box 3382, Bloomington, IN 47402, enimorigami@hotmail.com

Hey What's Up? #4

Oh, that crazy-kooky Troy Gallaher's at it again. It's sparse, it's shitty collage art, it's an asinine interview with Mr. Glenn Danzig, it's weird short stories that engage and confuse, it's actually pretty fucking awesome. Troy's taking zines to a level that's beyond lowest-common-denominator, and sinking that low is grand. (AA)

Stamp or trade, 1047 Lanette Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45230, labloidssay@aol.com

Hot Sex #3

Cheeky takes on porn, the sex trade, STDs, and other hard facts intermingled sweetly here with actual, useful sex tips, strong writing, and nicely re-appropriated hardcore porn collages. That I was alerted to its existence when someone handed me a much-needed condom with the Hot Sex mailing address scrawled on it only serves as a metaphor for how necessary this zine is to a country seemingly revisiting the McCarthy era. (AEM)

\$1, PO Box 2142, Madison, WI 53701-2141

Hypocritical Mass #1

This humor zine is sort of funny, but the jokes drag. These dudes need to spend a day reading just the part of *The Onion* with the stand-alone headlines. Sometimes a funny idea can stand on its own. Theirs (talking shit about the moon, a Lazlo-like letter) are promising, but they drag on too long. (DAL)

\$2.50, hypocriticalmass@hotmail.com

Impact Press #52

The most interesting parts of this are animal-related. There's a well-researched piece on animal rights laws abroad, like how drivers in part of New Zealand may be required by law to pull over and help injured animals. There's also a provocative look at hardcore animal-rights activists prosecuted as terrorists. (DAL)

PMB 361, 10151 University Blvd., Orlando, FL 32817, www.impactpress.com

Impact Press #53

Impact trades in its typical heavy-handed content for a more vulnerable and humanistic atmosphere: the imminent election while being pounded by hurricanes galore. Their bias is slightly curbed to a humility that's rare in activist circles, making the info-heavy content much more palatable. (VC)

\$2, PMB 361, 10151 University Blvd., Orlando, FL 32817, www.impactpress.com

Jerk Magazine #1

This zine includes an advice column that instructs readers about the appropriate technique for administering a handy to an uncircumcised gent. Many of the political articles are now dated, as this is their special election issue. But, the cultural features on the resurgence of knitting and an interview with the Instructoart creator are still worthwhile. (AC)

\$1, 126 Schine Student Center, Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY 13244, www.jerkmag.net

Juniper, The #4

In this installment, Dan rides his bike to all of his local community gardens and gives us a documented account of what he finds there. It got me into the spirit of such activities, and I started to notice them in my own

town as I cycled around. Inspiring and informational. (JB)
Stamp, Dan Murphy, PO Box 6352, Boise, ID 83707

Junket #1

Why is it that service job zines tend to top the list as the more interesting fare? Is it because we can relate and share the woes of being a reluctant "wage slave"? Or is it because we take glee in observing the behaviors of the pathetic little beings that we like to call humans? For those who prefer the latter, Justin offers up a dense volume of the unusual customers of his work day as a Pittsburgh cab driver: drug dealers, hookers, drunks, punks and the rest of life's vagrants. These are not HBO's *Taxi Cab Confessions*, where passengers candidly spill their guts, but instead doing their day-to-day rituals, except they live absurd lives in a fucked up world. It reads like a driver's log; Justin doesn't feel compelled to craft the stories into a meaningful portrayal or a moral stance. He doesn't really inject his own opinion. Readers are left to observe and simply marvel. The stories range from humorous encounters to sentimental coincidence to infuriating morons to some straight-up depressing tales. A compelling read from beginning to end, *Junket* is destined to become a great series. (VC)

\$3, PO Box, Pittsburgh, PA 15213, Justin@crucialunit.com

Kiss Machine #9

A theme-based literary magazine highlights fiction, poetry and essays. I had a hard time grasping the last issue, but easily embraced this issue's more cohesive "Love and Celebrities." Cliche, but it's why we flock to E! Entertainment. Particular standouts include "The Poem is Andy Kaufman" and "Astronomy for the Star Struck." (VC)

\$5, PO Box 108, Station P, Toronto, ON, M5S 2S8, Canada, www.kissmachine.org

Livingproof #3

I have to commend Andrew Mall because each issue of this zine appears in my mailbox despite my twice-written mediocre responses to him. He's dedicated, he's got a vision, and he sticks to it in the face of criticism, and there is something to be said about that. Unfortunately though, this is my least favorite issue of the zine thus far. The only thing that really stuck out to me was the interview with Dan Sinker about the nuts and bolts of running *Punk Planet*. Much of the rest of the writing is a bit too wordy and meandering for me, whether he's talking about his lack of athletic prowess, reality TV or going to Italy. If some literary deconstructing of everyday things sounds good to you, pick this up. (JB)

\$3, PO Box 14211 Chicago, IL 60614 livingproof@atm4.net

Loserdom #12

Ireland puts out some good scene zines, and this one is no exception. There's a great article on the investigation of subcultures and a fun comic piece about the punk bike marathon, Le Tour Punk. It's a bit male-centric, but overall an interesting read. (CS)

\$4, Anto, 17 New Cobra Rd., Philsboro, Dublin 17, Ireland

Media Whore #4

Randle goes beyond ranting to present new information about feminist media, focusing on performance and visual art. Her zine is well written and packaged coherently, with strong design and photos. I was fascinated by the articles on fat cheerleaders and Chrissy Caviar, who presents her own eggs as contemporary art. (LG)

\$2, Randle Farm Lane, 20 Ricky Drive, Framingham, MA 01702, www.mediawhorezine.com

Negative Space #3

A simple personal/political zine covering topics such as the Iraq war, the election, bikes=freedom, and punk shows. There's nothing mind-blowing here, but that's not the point. I can tell everything was written with heart, and this zine will definitely get better with future issues. (CS)

\$1.50, PO Box 8266, Boise, ID 83707-3266, negativespacezine@yahoo.com

Off-Line #31

Political zines get bogged down in dogmatic scolding rather than personal example or reflection. Through an inspirational interview with David Dellinger and his own accounts of war tax resistance, Vincent Romano gives political writing the sugar it needs to digest. Claire Cocco's short-

ABOUT OUR REVIEWS: We make every attempt to review all the zines (or magazines) we receive, as long as they are released independently. However, despite our best efforts, not every zine ends up in here for a myriad of reasons. Records marked with a little eye (◑) are designated as "highlight" reviews by the reviewer. That means it's a zine that really stands out for them this time around, but just because a review doesn't have an eye doesn't mean it isn't good. Finally, if a reviewer doesn't like your zine, it's just one person's opinion, so don't freak out. We're sure you put a good deal of work into your project and that alone is worth some congratulations!



story contribution and vegan recipes round out the issue. (VC)
Free/postage, Vincent Romano/Claire Cocco, 35 Barker Ave. #46, White Plains, NY 10601

Panache Magazine #21

Panache stands apart from similar zines because of its great selection of band interviews: TV On The Radio, Wives, The Plot To Blow Up The Eiffel Tower, and Hospitals, among others. It no doubt appeals to a mostly hipster crowd, but it's good work nonetheless. (CS)

Free (send \$1 for postage), PO Box 410622, San Francisco, CA 94141, panachemagazine@hotmail.com

Peace, Love & Chaos #7

This zine is mostly composed of reviews, although some of these will be of interest for those interested in the South African punk scene. The editor provides a helpful essay on the history of South African punk, which has a fascinating account of the nascent punk scene under Apartheid. (AC)

No price given, PO Box 3397, Cresta 2118, Gauteng, South Africa, exist52002@yahoo.com

Pearl Necklace #1

Although this zine features lots of cool gimmicks (color photocopies, slick cover, inserted goodies), it ignores countless opportunities to say something new or acknowledge history. Without irony, a writer uses the phrase "launch pad" when writing about menstrual art. The high point: Yoriko's bonus hand-drawn Japanese recipe booklet. (LG)

\$5, www.pearlnecklacezine.com

Perfect Mix Tape Segue, The #3

Joe remembers the tough time he had growing up, knowing that he was an "accidental child." His history combined with seeing many of his friends having unplanned babies forced him to think about alternatives. And what an alternative: a vasectomy. Dude got his cock'n' balls poked up! (AA)

\$1.5307 N. Minnesota Ave., Portland, OR 97217-4551, www.microcosmpublishing.com

PFE

This is yet another crazy compilation zine. There are pieces that don't make much sense, like "Eating Sushi is as Easy as Liking Joy Division" alongside interviews and other articles. Not my kind of zine, but I'm sure it works well with the author's record label or...something. (CS)

\$2, pfezine@yahoo.com

Picaresque #7

The writer admits that even he may come to regard this collection of anecdotes as his "bland period," and he's right. Nevertheless, one memorable episode describes how an uncircumcised friend held his foreskin closed while urinating, which created a horrifying, but comical "water balloon effect." (AC)

\$2, c/- 17 Mayes St., Stawell, Victoria, Australia 3380, brendanrocks@hotmail.com

Premiere Generation Ink #7

PGI is one nicely assembled, intelligent read. There is great poetry and some wonderful woodcuts, and it's evident that editors take great care in choosing what they include. Everything is rounded out by interviews with poet Alix Olsen and Naomi Klein of No Logo creation. Recommended. (CS)

\$5, PO Box 2056, Madison, WI 53701, www.pgink.com

Radix #2

Summarily informative about current US/Foreign relations, but reads like a response to an essay prompt for your Political Science 101 class. Nothing new is being exposed amidst a ton of Bush shit-talking. Perhaps it's worth it just for the shit talking... (AA)

Free, PO Box 3312 Warrenton, VA 20188, www.radixcollective.com

RE/fuse #3

I'll admit that I was pretty weary at first when I opened this sociopolitical newspaper to find a "Soap Box" on one of its first pages. These sorts of proclamations of simplified revolutions usually portend some half-assed ponderings on the current state how much the government sucks. But then I flipped the page and was pleasantly surprised to find some refreshing content, shit I actually wanted to read. Highlights include an interview with a French culture jammer, our very own Dan Sinker, and others; DIY guide to defacing other people's property; and some intriguing radical art. Definitely worth seeking out if you're into good, subversive

readings, and it also adds points to your fucking-shit-up card. (AA)
\$1.50, J.J. Cremerstraat 5-1, 1054 TC Amsterdam, The Netherlands, refuse_fanzine@hotmail.com

S.C.A.L.P. #3

Dan kinda pisses me off in his zine, ranting nonstop about his dad, who is bankrolling a European trip that has Dan moaning and forlornly pursuing a hot German chick while angsting about his girlfriend back home. I love the squirm moment when Dan's dad brags about his sex life. (LG)

\$2, Dan W., lifethebikelane@yahoo.com, www.parcellpress.com

Silent Crisis Center chapbook

There is a suppressed violence in B. Alan Ellis' poetry that demands your attention. Not the pleading, weeping kind that usually gets submitted to *Punk Planet*, but more like "If you don't read me right now, I will climb out of these pages, tear your intestines out with a plastic fork and then hang you with them because I really hate your fucking guts." It does not subscribe to today's climate of amoral violence and sex, for the images portrayed here reek with rare emotional depth. Recurring images of severed appendages, rape and disembowelment dot the verses with enough justifiable passion to separate it from shocking for shock's sake. Let's just say that this is some hateful, despicable shit. Its headstrong masculinity rarely apologizes, and readers are treated to an elegant, twisted rampage in a world where no one is innocent, sex is painful, and very few survive. (VC)

\$2 U.S., \$3 elsewhere, House of Vlad Productions, 55 Brett Lane, Temple, GA 30179, houseofvlad@hotmail.com

Skyscraper #17

This slickly produced magazine is an exhaustive compendium of interviews and reviews with many of the current luminaries of punk and indie rock. Punk historians will enjoy the interview with Mission Of Burma, while effete hipster types will dig the interviews with Franz Ferdinand and Les Savy Fav. (AC)

\$4.99, PO Box 4432, Boulder, CO 80306, www.skyscrapermagazine.com

Slug #189

This local Salt Lake City alternative magazine provides features on music and art, occasionally diving into the national scene. This issue is the "Pi-rate Issue," so there's plenty of trivial tidbits just in time for the recent failed Peter Pan DVD to hit retail. (VC)

Free/postage, 351 West Pierpoint Ave., Ste. 4B, SLIC, UT 84101, www.slugmag.com

Slug #190

Slug covers local music and skateboard culture in Salt Lake City in a full-color extravaganza that's half reviews/interviews and half ads. It's easy to pick out the unpaid copy because the type is so damn small you can barely see it. (LG)

Free, Salt Lake Underground, 351 Pierpoint Ave. Ste. 4B, Salt Lake City, UT 84101, www.slugmag.com

Smokescreen

A quick and highly enjoyable set of stories, fiction, anecdotes and a rant about outsourcing and free trade. As the title suggests, cigarettes are a reoccurring theme. I happily ate up every word here and wanted more. It ended much too quickly. (JB)

fuzztooth@hotmail.com

Solitary Existence #2

It feels like you're peeking into Travis Harramen's notebook of anti-government, anti-America, anti-Bush rants. The serious stuff reads like generic anti-everything angst, but the funny stuff is pretty good, like mock schedule for the RNC which listed at 9:30 PM, "Reagan elevated to savior, Holy Trinity now referred to as 'quads.'" (AA)

\$1, free to prisoners. Fanorama Society, 109 Arnold Ave., Cranston, RI 02905, www.fanorama.tk

Stereotype, The #2

This zine explores the political implications of stereotyping—"like [when someone says] 'I just went to the Baker' and you think of a man in a Puffy Hat." This is a stereotype, thepreteen authors explain. Filled with

pictures and captions about the pratfalls of stereotyping, like not realizing that the nice-looking girl is "actually very nasty," this zine is easily the most brilliant to come along in months. Even fairies, ballerinas, dads, santas, coffee and grills can be victims of stereotyping. Readers are invited to send in their favorite stereotype: just don't send a picture of a stereotypical "breakfast" (two eggs, two pieces of bacon, a glass of orange juice)—they already covered that one in issue two. (AEM)

\$1, L. Upchurch/F. Bradley, 2724 N. Meade, Chicago, IL 60639

Sugar Needle #26

Sugar Needle knows candy, and since I've become acquainted with their zine, I often wander the aisles of the local stores looking for strange new candies to send them to review. But how can anything in my one-horse town compete with the likes of the Vidal company's oozing candy brains and fingers or a strange "confection" from Scotland called Highland Maid Eyeballs? Yes, Sugar Needle takes up the charge of reviewing all the candy that the rest of us are afraid to eat. I think I like their simple approach best: just a copy of the wrapper and the honest, joyful (or disgusting) truth about the candy. This time there's also an interview with Jean Thompson of Seattle Chocolates. Sugar Needle has given me yet another candy high. Once again recommended. (CS)

\$1+1 stamp, PO Box 330152, Minneapolis, MN 55408

Sweet Olive #2

Natalia accomplishes what I've always wanted to do: write a zine interviewing the coolest people I know because they live life in a way that's worth documenting. Not dumb people in stupid bands, but folks who commit their time to publishing books, repairing bikes, or even doing nothing but raising hell. (VC)

\$3, Natalia, 17 Railway Road, Dalkey County, Dublin, Ireland

Thermidor #2

Kate Amok floored me with this zine's retro-zine stylings. She reviews her favorite eccentrics, an interview with Lloyd Kaufmann of Troma Entertainment, how to perform B-grade horror movie special effects (like tearing heads off corpses), breaking into abandoned buildings, and, my favorite part, obscure history of violent Georgian politicians! A creepy incident at an old strip club, a corrupt mayor who got popular for wielding a machine gun and a dispute among three governors over who won an election. Some fantastic lessons from a thrilling zine. Thumbs up! (JB)

\$2, Kate Amok, 4229 Regent Sq., Philadelphia, PA 19104, www.thermidor.net

To The Man Who Shot Me (?)

I wanted to believe there was some meaning behind the crude drawings, snippets of music theory and math text, and random photos in this minimalist zine, but I couldn't find any. I liked the packet of free stickers, though. (LG)

No price given, tossacross@hotmail.com

Turpentine #5

One of my peeves is people writing about their dreams. You're telling me a story that never happened except when you were dead asleep. There's a lot of talk about dreams in this cut-n-paste zine, and that had me nodding off. Also interview with Dame Darcy and musings about being weird and junk. (AA)

\$1 & 60¢ stamp, or trade, 1162 Juliet Ave., St. Paul, MN 55105

Ugly Planet #2

Ugly Planet strives to be a thoughtful and political intersection between the indie rock and hip-hop scenes. It features interviews with female hip-hopers Northern State and indie rockers Trans Am and TV On The Radio, among others. The interview with punk squatter and androgynous artist Fly offers a fascinating overview of underground art and, well, squatting. (AC)

\$3.95, PO Box 205, New York, NY 10012, www.uglyplanet.com

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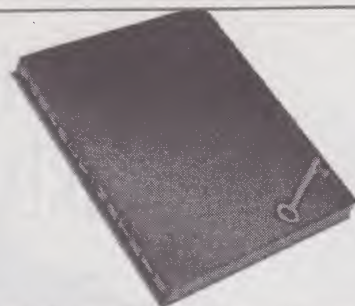
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MCR17

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JUST A FIRE Fly You Flag 7" MCR18 AINA Chrysanthemum 7" MCR15

DE FACTO Légende du Scorpion à Quatre Queues LP/CD MCR12

RETISONIC Lean Beat CDEP MCR14

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A T-Shirt & \$100: A video about zines in the Northwest. A cultural analysis of what causes zine makers to tick. Interviews with about 70 zine makers and enthusiasts. For people with a new interest in zines as well as pros & novices. The video sparks untapped creativity & new interest into zine making and reading. Artwork by Cristy Road & music by J Church & Defiance, OH! Made by Rev. Phil, Nickey Robo, and Joe Biel. 83 min VHS \$13. DVD \$10

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see also

Where to find more information
about this issue's features.

interviewed this issue:

Slint

Slint's legacy continues through their two groundbreaking albums *Tweeze* and *Spiderland*, which are available from Touch & Go records: www.tgrec.com

Dave Pajo's solo work with Papa M can be found at: www.papa-m.com

Baby Teeth

Don't keep them under your pillow, the tooth fairy ain't interested in these Baby Teeth: www.babyteethmusic.com

Nick Tilsen

Find out more about Tilsen's fight for the Black Hills and his work with the Lakota Action Network at www.lakotaaction.net. Email Tilsen directly at ntilsen@lakotaaction.net.

Fanorama Society

Read more about REB and all the cool shit he's doing, right now at: www.fanorama.tk

Die Kruezen

Check out the "Almost-official" Die Kreuzen web site: www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Vine/3258/diekreuzen.html

Many of Die Kruezen's albums are available from: www.tgrec.com

Also, check out Decapitado, Dan's latest band: www.decapitado.com

Strike Anywhere

Strike Anywhere has a lot to say, so go listen: www.exitenglish.com

Check out Strike Anywhere's latest album, *To Live In Discontent* at: www.jadetreec.com

Dan Sartain

His music makes you feel a little funny and gooey inside, it's all about heartbreak and cobras. So check it out: www.swamirecords.com

what do we do now?

"Fat" Mike Burkett

Keep up with Punk Voter at: www.punkvoter.com

And then go check out all of Burkett's Fat Wreck Chords at www.fatwreck.com

Medea Benjamin

Learn more about Benjamin's rada-cool feminist organizing at: www.codepink4peace.org

Bob McChesney

Read McChesney's media criticism on the web at: www.robertmcchesney.com

May First Collective

Long on to the May First Collective website: www.mayfirst.org

articles in this issue

Any Kind of Music but Country

If you still doubt that country music is the new punk, check out

Bloodshot Records: www.bloodshotrecords.com

Neko Case

Anti: www.anti.com
www.nekocase.com

Drag The River

www.dragtheriver.com

The Sadies

www.yeproc.com, www.thesadies.net

Robbie Fults

www.robbyfults.com

Pine Hill Haints

They don't have a website or anything, but they have a record on Lelp: www.lelprecordings.com

Jon Langford

www.mekons.de/jon.htm, Bloodshot

Whiskey & Co.

www.noidearecords.com/bands/whiskey.html

Sally Timms

<http://www.mekons.de/sallyfr.htm>, Bloodshot, www.tgrec.com

Count Out

Find out what the candidates had to say about election reform: <http://www.dinorossi.com> and <http://www.gregoire2004.com/>

Food For Thought

Learn more about the Namaste Charter School at their website: www.namastecharterschool.org

And if you want to learn more about weird, new-age approaches to raising kids:

YogaKids: www.yogakids.com

Brain Gym®: www.braingym.org

Reading in Motion: www.readinginmotion.org

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BROKEN BONES "Time For Anger, Not Justice"

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MI AMORE "Lamb"

"You know it's good before you even listen to it because it's named after a John Lee Hooker song. This is fucking hard heavy death and roll. Think ENTOMBED mixed with EYE HATE GOD mixed with fucking MOTORHEAD mixed with BLACK FLAG." -Nate Newton / Converge



THE DEEP EYNDE "Shadowland"

This is dark punk music SoCa style, with '80s new-wave vibes. The DEEP EYNDE is well known in the Hollywood underground scene for its intense live performances, reminiscent of acts such as the DAMNED, MISFITS, AGENT ORANGE, AFI and even early IGGY POP.



THREE.ONE.G →

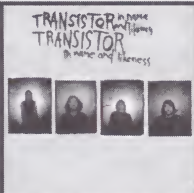
SOME GIRLS "The DNA Will Have Its Say"

Some Girls is made from scraps and pieces of punk murder junkies Justin Pearson, Wes Eisold, Rob Moran, Chuck Rowell, & Sal Gallegos. Guitars and growled-to-pulp-vocal-chords steamroller into an undead rhino charge of drums and bass, fast, heavy, menacing and stalking like jungle tigers.



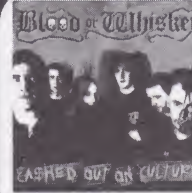
THE INSAINTS "Sins Of Saints"

The INSAINTS are remembered as one the most extreme and outrageous punk bands of all time. "Sins of Saints" is a 20 track anthology of great hardcore/street-punk rock, featuring their '93 studio session, as well as demos & live material from '90 & '92



TRANSISTOR TRANSISTOR "Erase All Names And Likeness"

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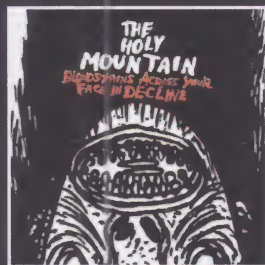
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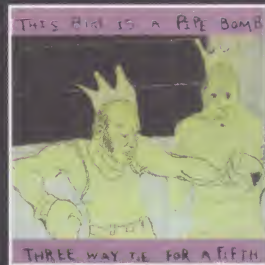
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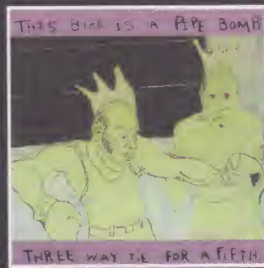
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